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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Identity and Communities of Practice

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Applied Linguistics
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts
In Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

By

Heidi Mohamed Badr El-Din

Under the supervision of Dr. Atta Gebril

December 2019

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions of English instructors on their professional identities, within private higher education institutions. The aim of the current study is to explore the perceptions of teachers' professional identities and the aspects that affect it, as well as, their perceptions of communities of practice and its effect on their professional identity. The study is conducted on 26 English instructors, who teach Academic English in private institutions. A qualitative approach is utilized and individual interviews, and focus group interviews were conducted with all the participants. Findings show that there are four main aspects that shape and affect a teacher's professional identity, such as teacher role, appreciation and connection, competence and self-efficacy, and future trajectories. These aspects seem to highly affect the instructors' professional identity in a positive way. Moreover, the teachers are aware of the significance of self-reflection and professional improvement.

Furthermore, there is an indication that membership in communities of practice is a crucial action in order to improve teachers' teaching skills, share common experiences and enhance social learning (Wenger, 1998). In addition, participants believe that it is a method for developing their performance to enhance their students' academic learning. Data also shows that it has a positive effect on teachers' professional identities. The study suggests some practical implications that could assist teacher educators, and if applied in teacher education programs and trainings could help in supporting and developing their professional identities.

Key words: Teacher Identity – Professional Identity – Communities of Practice – English Instructors – Higher Education

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Developing professional identity (PI) is a continuous and dynamic process in which individuals understand their encounters to shape and reshape their convictions regarding what it means to be in a specific occupation or a particular profession (as cited in Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Their viewpoints are shaped according to who they are as professionals in a certain expertise; this view of self in a profession involves values, beliefs, experiences and motives which are applied in order to describe and lead skillful practices and growth including moral and cognitive reasoning (Stricker, Westhauser, Lyle, Lowry & Sheets, 2019).

The development of this professional identity is highly influenced by the notion of ‘belonging’ which is a basic human emotional need that requires acceptance by others in certain groups. Therefore, excluding the notion of belonging, an individual might not be able to identify oneself as clearly, hence enduring difficulties while relating to one’s surroundings and communicating with others, which implies that belongingness is related to identity (Lane, 2018).

In the context of the teaching occupation, professional identity taps into a wide range of issues as this topic is a broad one and could be discussed from several aspects. Basically, these issues revolve around the teaching / learning goals, the classroom, and the teachers themselves. For example, students come to the classroom with different sets of abilities and experiences to enhance their learning.

Thus, teacher identity could be displayed through their instructional practices in the classroom by understanding students’ needs, the ability of managing the classroom, and the

capability of handling different students' attitudes and behavior (Aneja, 2016). The strategies of presenting the curriculum, assigning tasks, asking questions and conducting assessments are also aspects of a teacher's identity that infuse every part of a teacher's day and their interactions with students (Ellis, 2016). Another aspect is how teachers see themselves and their personal beliefs of their self-image. For the most part, the reflection of this self-image includes the teachers' experiences in their classes, their relationships with their fellow teachers, supervisors and other figures of authority (Kuo & Tseng, 2014).

In order for professional identity to develop and for a teacher's career to flourish, constant learning needs to occur. A critical factor in this development is teachers' communities of practice (CoP). A CoP is a group of people, who are bound together, as they share a passion for a common expertise, and they meet regularly to learn from each other (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Research has revealed that communities of practice can reinforce and strengthen teachers' professional practices, such as providing strategies to be used in order to enhance their students' academic performance. CoP would also give teachers a sense of their professional development needs by helping enhance their competence (Clarke, 2009; Fabregues, Ion, Meneses & Rodriguez-Gomez, 2012; Zahner, 2002).

Possible solutions and ideas for managing issues and dealing with problems, meaningful tools and stories are all a rich array of resources of shared learning experience between teachers in these communities of practice (Hou, 2015). Research affirms that communities of practice enable teachers to establish and develop their professional identity, improve their instructional and reflective practices (Boulton & Hramiak, 2012). It reduces teacher isolation by sustaining mutual support and connection, as well as provides peer mentoring (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). It gives support for teachers to identify their professional identity, define their future goals and

apply educational concepts in their regional context (Balatti, Haase, Hendreson & Knight, 2010; Bickel & Shin, 2012).

Subsequently, active participation in such communities allows teachers to share their knowledge and experiences, increases their self-efficacy and collaborative connection, and enables them to integrate their teaching practices and educational theories (Dibbon & Stevens, 2008; MacGreor & Vavasseur, 2008). Communities of practice support teachers' decision making and enhance their critical self-reflection (Kuo & Tseng, 2014; Yang, 2009). Likewise, it positively transforms their professional identity perceptions (Shroff & Trent, 2013), facilitates possible friendships and interpersonal relationships (Clarke, 2009) and enriches their teaching and learning views (Lu & Wang, 2012).

Over the past two decades, teacher identity studies have expanded particularly in English language teaching (Aneja, 2016; Barkhuizen, 2016; Clarke, 2008; Ellis, 2016; Menard-Warwick, 2008; Miller, 2009; Morgan, 2016). Specific focus has been given to issues of teacher learning, teacher education, professional development and communities of practice (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Kinsella, Meyer, Taylor & Yates, 2011; Shin & Seog, 2018; Yilmaz, 2016). A recent review by Hana, Oostdam, Severiens & Zijlstra (2019), which included some of the previously mentioned studies, identified six main domains of teacher identity. Those domains are self-image, job satisfaction, task perception, commitment, self-efficacy and motivation.

1.2 Teacher Professional Identity

As it has been previously mentioned, professional identity has emerged in the past years as a crucial research area in the educational field (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). It is believed that teachers' PI has a fundamental effect on students' academic achievement (Beijaard, Meijer &

Verloop, 2004; Krejsler, 2005; McMillan & Robinson, 2006). In general, PI has been characterized as the ownership of a set of beliefs, values and assumptions about particular attributes of one's selected profession that differentiates it from other professions (Chan, Thomas & Weinrach, 2001). Hence, PI is defined as the teachers' commitment and dedication to their professional practices (Enyedy, Goldberg & Welsh, 2006).

In other words, when teachers are committed and dedicated to their practices, it is more likely that they are able to identify and associate themselves with their professional identity. Lankveld, Beishuizen, Croiset, Schoonenboom, Volman (2017) investigated the processes in teaching courses and teacher communities that strengthen teachers' identities and help in their professional development. Findings revealed that both approaches; teaching courses and teacher communities increased a sense of competence, feelings of positivity towards being a teacher, developing connectedness with other teachers, self-appreciation and future career goals.

Throughout teachers' careers, professional identity develops and provides a sense of persistence and continuity regarding their past, present and future. The concept of PI also alludes to what teachers find significant in their professional lives, in light of their own encounters, personal backgrounds and history (Cote & Levine, 2002). For instance, Masoumpanah and Zarei, (2014) investigated Iranian language teachers' views regarding their professional identity and their perception of professional competence. The results revealed that Iranian teachers had a strong sense of professional and pedagogical competency in alignment with their professional identity, especially the ones who hold a PhD/MA degree.

Moreover, Nias (1989) argues that it is critical how teachers see themselves; a teacher's well-developed professional identity is more inclined to deal with educational change, develop professionally and implement innovations in his/her own teaching practice. Through self-

assessment, one's identity is consistently informed, shaped and reshaped as individuals' progression and development is evolved by time and through interaction with others. This implies that a teacher's potential to modify their professional identity is consistently present (Cooper & Olson, 1996).

According to Helms (1998), experience, society and culture are three main elements that influence a teacher's PI. They are expressed in four dimensions; values and beliefs, actions, how and where people perceive themselves and their future goals, and social expectations. However, six elements might have a significant role in shaping a teacher's PI has been proposed by Ferguson, Haley, Mazor, Philbin, Quirk and Starr (2006). The six elements include knowledge and skills regarding teaching, intrinsic satisfaction from teaching, receiving rewards for teaching, feeling the responsibility to teach, sharing clinical expertise with learners, and belonging to a group of educators.

Recently, Danielewicz (2014) accentuated that for enhancing a teacher's PI, they should have the opportunity to share their experiences, philosophies, visions, social values and responsibilities concerning their teaching. Also, Day (2003) discovered that the main components of a teacher's PI are beliefs and ideologies, job satisfaction and efficacy, commitment and motivation, and personal and professional values.

It is argued by Starr et al. (2003) that there are sociological and psychological factors that affect the professional identity of teachers. Sociological factors involve relationships with staff, colleagues and students, policy, institutions, schools, reform movements and culture. while psychological factors involve experiences, knowledge and life history, concerns, emotions, attitudes and character, motivation and commitment, confidence and satisfaction, passions, hopes, and dreams.

Furthermore, Bransford and Hammond (2005) support that in order to develop and improve a solid teacher identity; competence is highly required in teaching practices such as classroom management, adjusting to diverse learners and assessment. Competence in subjects / courses taught, students' development and the general purposes of education is also required. Several studies claim that PI plays an essential role in a teacher's career and that it is critical in the determination of the teachers' commitment to their profession (Brown, 2006; Bennison & Goos, 2008; Hung, 2008; Isbell, 2008; Graham & Roberts, 2008).

1.3 Communities of Practice

In the past ten years, research from a sociocultural perspective concerning teachers and their workplaces has grown rapidly. Many studies report on teachers' intentional efforts in learning communities that are designed to encourage knowledge sharing and problem solving regarding common issues (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; King, 2002; Mitchell, 1999; Stein & Brown, 1997; Stein, Silver, & Smith, 1998; Supovitz, 2002). In these communities, teachers may struggle with certain issues in their profession and they would receive the right type of mentoring, training and support (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011).

The CoP perspective as argued by Lave and Wenger (1991), however, does not separate intentional learning efforts from the naturally occurring learning inserted in the everyday teachers' practice, a fact that is frequently lost in support for the communities of practice approach to professional development. Communities of practice non-formal learning contributes significantly to the community's character and, consequently, to the teachers' professional learning quality (Brown & Duguid, 2017; Bryk, Camburn & Louis, 1999; Knight, 2002).

Furthermore, it is usually the non-formal learning of the community that undermines increasingly intentional learning efforts (Wenger, 1998). It is also critical to acknowledge that

CoP, that have the potential for innovation and productive change, are most likely able to maintain prejudice, stereotypes and catastrophic practices (Orr, 1996; Wenger, 1998). Specifically, where the community is firmly reinforced and bonded because of shared values, learning is probably going to affirm the belief of existing thought and action instead of open group or individual practices to assessment and modification (Knight, 2002).

As social learning is a reciprocal process, it results from cooperation and participation of the teachers within the community. When teachers regularly interact with their associates, they form their instructive practice; they set up social standards for connections among members, they determine their profession's purpose, and they recognize which activities are valued. Due to their intrinsic learning potential, CoPs offer a pathway to enhanced and improved educational change and teacher quality (Wenger, 1998).

Furthermore, obtaining membership in a CoP requires mutuality (Wenger, 1998). This implies that members profit by the assets of the training, however they likewise make contributions to the practice. Members / teachers new to the community are conceded peripheral enrollment, which changes to full enrollment as they create authenticity and expertise by contributing to the work of the collective (Wenger, 1998).

As long as teachers are members of a community of practice that they primarily identify with and their affiliation is solid, they are most likely to incorporate learning into their practice. Nevertheless, learning that occurs as a result of interaction with other communities of practice members, results in changes in the teachers' practice, though less frequent, might be more intense (Coburn, 2001).

Wenger (1998) states that teachers usually belong to several communities of practice, so informal learning happens through a pattern of coinciding memberships. Also, evidence supports

the significance of setting up the learning community with a variety of levels of expertise in order to stimulate productive learning, fundamentally, building diversity as a crucial element of the community (Davis & Sumara, 2001; Pugach, 1999).

In the above mentioned studies, the similarities and differences between teachers' perceptions about their professional identities were presented, including their learning experiences throughout their career and changes in their identities. Although questionnaires have several limitations like many other methods, several studies used questionnaires for collecting their data. Generally, when participants are asked to retrieve information from their long-term memory, there is a possibility of selected information as it is influenced by other people, events and new information (as cited in Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004).

Another point is that, a large number of the studies focused on novice teachers and student teachers, only a few focused on the experience variable and its influence on their professional identities. The experience factor could remarkably contribute to the understanding of teachers' professional identities and how they see themselves professionally. There were other factors that could influence a teacher's perceptions of their PI that were not considered in some studies, such as experiential, contextual and biographical factors. Additionally, none of the studies tackled any of the educational theories, which help in forming novice teachers' PI.

Furthermore, professional identity and communities of practice studies might not be generalized to different countries and cultures, as they are conducted in the researchers' own countries and educational settings. Some studies relied on convenience sampling, and this resulted in subjectivity and biases. Also, a few studies did not consider teacher differences; working in different contexts, and resulting in facing different problems and encountering dissimilar educational requirements. These previously mentioned factors could vary and affect

the ‘knowledge-sharing’ aspect in communities of practice, which proves that these studies cannot be generalized.

1.4 Statement of the Research Problem

There are several problems that face teachers in their career, including low income and lack of professional development. In addition, some people who are not pedagogically qualified work as teachers due to limited job opportunities in other sectors. These challenges usually lead to lack of commitment, demotivation, and by default a deformed teacher identity.

However, only very few studies in Egypt have tackled these issues but not directly. Most of the research conducted in Egypt has been concerned with other aspects of education (Awad, 2016; Megahed, 2016). Some studies have tackled teachers’ practices in higher institutions and teachers’ perceptions about leadership (Salama, 2018; Wahba, 2018). Also, another set of studies have explored educational policies and teachers’ techniques for classroom management and students’ behavior (Abdou, 2016; Abdel Kerim, 2016). Teacher development programs provided by the government (Sarhan, 2018) and by NGOs (Kamel, 2018) have been examined as well.

Yet, a limited number of studies have looked into teacher identity in Egypt. El Deghaidy (2006) explored pre-service science teachers’ beliefs in relation to self-efficacy and self-image, as well as the impact of a science teaching methods course on these two variables. Abdel Fattah (2016) examined negotiated teacher identity in regards to teaching practices, students and context in two Egyptian universities.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The present study will explore higher education English instructors’ perceptions of their teacher/professional identities and how they see themselves as teachers. This study will also

focus on the perspectives of those teachers towards the effect of communities of practice on their professional identity. The study can be considered as an addition to the research done on Egyptian education system in general and Egyptian teachers in particular. Also, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, the study could add to the limited amount of research on Egyptian English instructors' points of view regarding their professional identity.

1.6 Research Questions:

What are the Egyptian teachers' perceptions of their professional identity?

To what extent is a teacher's professional identity affected by communities of practice?

1.7 Definitions of Terms and Constructs:

1.7.1 Theoretical Definitions of Terms and Constructs

Professional Identity: Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), define a teacher's PI as an identity that includes the perception of the kind of educator one endeavors to be in a specific setting and the identification with teaching as a profession. This includes both the more profound feeling of embodiment that is identity related which involves complete "adoption and expression of a professional identity through the person, or the self" (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 180).

Teacher identity has also been shown to be related to commitment, job satisfaction, motivation and self-efficacy (Day & Flores, 2006).

Community of practice: As stated by McDermott, Snyder and Wenger (2002), a CoP is a group of individuals who build relationships, interact and learn together. In this practice, they develop a sense of mutual commitment and belonging.

1.7.2 Operational Definitions of Terms and Constructs

Professional Identity: University teachers' identity is defined in this study based on four elements. These four psychological processes were identified by Croiset, Beishuizen, Schoonenboom, Van Lankveld and Volman (2017). First, there is *appreciation*, where a teacher's identity is strengthened and stabilized through feeling appreciation for their work. Second, having a sense of *connection* with other teachers through mutual trust and shared experiences. Third, being *competent* in their work, and particularly when this competence is recognized by others. Fourth, the ability to imagine *future career trajectories*, where the teacher can foresee their career advancement "based on their educational merits".

Community of practice: "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." (Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1). This definition will be adopted in this study including its' three characteristics. These three characteristics are essential for communities of practice; the domain, the community and the practice. First, the domain's identity is "defined by a shared domain of interest". While, the community is where the members meet and engage in common activities, help each other and share information. Finally, the practice is by sharing a "repertoire of resources" such as experiences, tools, stories and ways of dealing with recurring problems (Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). Communities of practice in this study will include pre-semester workshops, membership in formal / non-formal and online communities of practice.

List of Abbreviations:

PI: professional identity

CoP: communities of practice

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher professional identity (PI) is an important topic that has been researched from various angles. This study will focus on exploring university teachers' perceptions concerning their professional identity, sociocultural factors that impact it, and the effect of communities of practice on their PI. This chapter is divided into three main sections. These sections are thematically organized and include the review of literature regarding the topic of this study; teachers' professional identity. Each section consists of various definitions, explicit discussion and related studies for the main themes of this study and the research questions.

The first section includes a general overview of the concept of identity, conceptual framework for teachers' professional identity, as well as the sociocultural variables that affect it, and studies relevant to the first research question. The second section includes communities of practice definitions, theoretical frameworks related to communities of practice, and also relevant literature in this area. The third section includes definitions of teachers' beliefs and perceptions concerning their professional identity and communities of practice.

2.1 Teacher Professional Identity (PI)

A major obstacle in understanding '*identity*' is determining and reaching consensus on a definition for it, as an assortment of issues surface in any endeavor to achieve this purpose. One ought to struggle to understand the association between identity and the self, the function of emotion and the shaping of this identity. Other struggles for apprehension include the influence of discourse, interviews and narratives in comprehending the idea of identity, as well as, connection between shaping identity and reflections, contextual elements which hinder or promote the formation of identity. Last but not least, the duty of teacher training programs in

creating opportunities for developing teacher identities is another struggle (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

An overall perception of a teacher's professional identity is found to be useful as it "stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society" (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). Basically, identity is not fixed nor is it forced but it is "negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience" (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013), argues that, one reason for the increased attention to teachers' PI is the framework it provides for comprehending how teachers formulate their perspective on teaching and how these formulations might affect their own practice. Also, Olsen (2008) views identity as a label for a set of influences and impacts from actual contexts, social positioning, previous constructs of self and a meaningful framework that becomes interwoven inside the stream of activity as a teacher synchronously responds to and arranges given settings and human connections at given moments.

In a study on teacher professional identity, Beijard, Meijer and Verloop (2004), stated that a teacher's identity is "an ongoing process and therefore that identity is dynamic rather than stable, a constantly evolving phenomenon". They explain that it involves a teacher and a context where they acquire their professional identity. Gee (2001) perceives that identity proposes a 'sort of individual' inside a specific context. Although one may have a core identity, there are various forms of this identity as one performs in different contexts. He distinguishes four different ways that identity may be seen; institution-identity which is derived from a position perceived by power, affinity-identity which is influenced by one's practices in connection to external groups,

discourse-identity resulting from the talk of others about oneself and nature-identity which stems from one's natural state.

Furthermore, the acquisition of a teacher's professional identity is shaped due to the challenges that a teacher faces, learning outcomes and the influence of strong teacher identities whom they met throughout their lives. Concisely, teachers intentionally develop their professional identities, throughout academic processes, which will influence them, their decisions and choices when teaching (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2010).

According to Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), a teacher's PI includes assimilation with teaching as a profession and the perceptions of the type of teacher one attempts to be in a specific context. This requires performing the role of a teacher and the "deeper sense of embodiment related to identity involved in the full adoption and expression of a professional identity through the person, or the self" (as cited in Benson & Gu, 2015). Despite the fact that PI has multiple definitions, Gao (2010) confirms that it is concerned with how the teacher understands themselves, see themselves and their role as educators, as well as their relationships with others (Lasky, 2005).

As previously mentioned, even though PI is linked to concepts of self, how teachers view themselves (Erikson, 1968), and understanding one's self (Kelchtermans, 2005), it is viewed as impacted by expectations and conceptions for others as well, incorporating widely accepted image in society of what a teacher should be like (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Research about teachers' professional identity has emphasized that these social expectations / standards could clash with teachers' personal aspirations and practices of good teaching (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop 2004; Korthagen, 2004). Indeed, teachers' PI is formed and developed through

interactions with others, it also strongly determines how teaching is practiced, how teachers approach changes in education and how they professionally improve and develop.

Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) reported in their review of research on teachers' PI, that the concept of identity has various meanings and definitions in progressively broad literature just as in the realm of teaching and teacher training. In some studies, the concept of identity remains obscure, vague and its definition is not explicitly utilized. However, in various examinations, teacher PI has been identified with images of self while in others the attention was on the teacher's role. Among the factors that influence a teacher's professional identity is the teacher's education, their knowledge and learning, and teaching practice experiences.

Teachers are also exposed to expectations from the heads of departments, mentors, colleagues, students, parents and even the government expectations are according to national standards. These expectations are about the teacher's role, competency level, professional practices and behavior. To a limited degree, these expectations might be integrated in the teacher's PI. Hashwani (2013) confirms that teachers' identity is influenced by experience, time, social and cultural conditions. He states that their professional and personal identities are formed and shaped within the sociocultural environment, and that the teaching profession is perceived subsequently.

Therefore, research on teacher professional identity can be separated into three categories: studies which focus on teachers' professional identity formation, studies that focus on the characteristics of teachers' PI and studies in which PI was represented by teachers' narratives (Beijard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). More importantly, the significance of supporting the development of a teacher's professional identity has been highlighted in many studies such as Bullough and Baughman (1997), Mayer-Smith, Moon and Wideen (1998), Mayer (1999), Nias

(2002), Korthagen (2004), Olsen (2008), Beijaard (2009), Beauchamp and Thomas (2009). This kind of development can improve a teacher's commitment to their profession and improve their confidence for taking decisions about their career and instructional practices (Aelterman, Devos, Rots & Vlerick, 2010). Accordingly, evidence demonstrates that a stable and a solid teacher professional identity is emphatically related not only to the teacher's emotional prosperity (Zembylas, 2013), but also to the quality and the nature of instructing in the classroom (Agee, 2004; Beijaard, 2009).

Teachers' engagement and motivation is related to their willingness to be in the profession of teaching. Hawk, Y. Zahng, X. Zahng and Zhao (2016) explore Chinese pre-service teachers' professional identities and its link with learning and motivation. They argue that teachers' extrinsic and intrinsic learning motivations regarding teacher training programs can be stimulated in several ways. They give examples for extrinsic motivations such as being respected and appreciated as a teacher, having a good job and salary wise. While intrinsic motivations are enthusiasm, high performance and their passion for teaching.

Their findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between professional identity, learning motivations and teacher training programs. In addition, developing a strong professional identity gives an incentive for a better performance in their jobs, as well as future occupations. They claim that a weak professional identity could be one of the reasons for a teacher's indifference and lack of commitment towards their job. They state that their research could provide implications for teacher training as it offers crucial information to improve pre-service teachers' performance.

Shoulders (2018), investigates professional identity of agriculture teachers, in her study. Her research is guided by planned behavior and constructivism theories by Azjen (1991). She

claims that decisions such as classroom management, instructions and teacher collaboration, are taken by teachers as a consequence of the identity developed in the internal and social contexts of their background characteristics, discipline and school. Her findings suggest that there is a link between teachers' knowledge, attitude towards teaching, engagement and interaction and professional identity. A few teachers claim that they would seek careers in the agriculture industry if they were not agriculture teachers. She suggests that her study provides information for practitioners and researchers in the field of agriculture education, as well as its limitations and assumptions are convenient for further research to fully understand how IP influences teachers' behavior.

High levels of professional commitment are one of the vital aspects for a teacher's PI and self-efficacy as some teachers, in various fields, tend to behave unethically when negative feedback about their competence is received (Gantman, Gollwitzer, Marquardt & Oettingen, 2016). A study by Eren and Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez (2017) focuses on pre-service teachers' stance on their sense of efficacy and professional commitment. Teachers' commitment to teaching is defined as career choice satisfaction, engagement in teaching profession and career aspirations. The researchers shed light on the teachers' ethical stances to see the effect of negative feedback on their professional competence. Results show that the teachers have a strong sense of efficacy and professional commitment which preserved their ethical stances despite the negative prejudicial feedback they received concerning their competence. Although this study obtains data by self-report instruments that are proven reliable and valid, future studies should consider in-class observational methods to examine from an insider's perspective.

Abu-Alruz and Khasawneh (2013) aim to develop a validated professional identity questionnaire (PIQ) to measure PI among faculty members. The questionnaire has four factors;

work related identity, skill related identity, student related identity and self-related identity. They define work-related identity with item questions that focus on professional commitment to their institution and their students. Student related identity is defined through instructional practices and task perception, learning environment and class management, helping students in applications, tailoring teaching methods according to students' interests, needs and abilities. Self-related identity involves dedication and commitment to the teaching profession, connection with other teachers, recognition and appreciation. Then, the skill related identity consists of self-image, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, competency and future goals.

The findings of this study imply that all faculty members have high levels of self and skill related identities. They are dedicated and committed to their job, are passionate about their profession, enjoy sharing their experiences and ideas with their colleagues and like the appreciation and recognition they get. Moreover, they are interested in constant learning by seeking opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge for professional growth. Work related identity shows moderate levels regarding the faculty members' involvement in curriculum arrangements, understanding of policy and procedures and commitment to university vision, mission and goals. Abu-Alruz and Khasawneh (2013) claim that, this moderate level might be due to the absence of exertion on faculty members' part to pursue after these territories. However, low levels of student related identity are exhibited. The researchers speculate that it might be because of the bureaucracy and the teacher centered approach that still dominates, as PI could be heavily influenced by the culture and society.

This previously mentioned study represents a multidimensional instrument, which precisely measures the PI constructs of faculty members in higher education settings and gives

solid proof to its construct legitimacy. The questionnaire is notably relevant to be used among faculty members in higher education institutions.

Fletcher, Kosnik and Mandigo (2013) examine teacher professional identity, self-efficacy and task perception among physical education (PE) teachers. The researchers aim to explore the changes in the PE teachers' identity and their self-efficacy to overcome the obstacles that occurred during their training. Results show that the PE teachers' PI positively changed after their teacher training; due to various activities that were included in the program. These activities promoted teaching skills, teachers' competence and self-efficacy and broad development in their skills and competences. Their task perception became clearer and they state that they found creative ways to instruct students and engage them in collaborative learning environment.

Day and Kington (2008), claim that teaching objectives and aims are highlighted along PI, as well as the concept of job satisfaction. They argue that the approaches of the environment of the workplace, students and the administration system establish the teachers' professional identity. They also assert that teachers can deal with academic problems, such as, students having difficulties in learning, especially within training programs. Additionally, as personal development plays a critical role in teachers' PI, teachers learn different methods to deal with and to manage their relations with their colleagues in order to create a positive work environment.

Teachers' personal characteristics are displayed in their teaching skills and practices, which makes PI the key to success and achievement in the teaching profession. Since individual attributes are correlated with their professional life, personal identification is acutely assimilated with the PI of the teachers. Their sense of responsibility is set up among them as they are aware of their social recognition besides their consideration of their roles as teachers. They are also

required to constantly improve and enhance their professional identity, as this development will result in the accomplishment of the educational institutions' aims and objectives (Vermunt, 2008).

Not to mention, the students will get the learning outcomes and proper academic performance as indicated by the requirements of the modern age. Enhancing the PI will also lead towards the support and implementation of modern technology in their teaching skills, and that will make the process of teaching and learning, interesting for the teachers and engaging for the students (Bunuan & Hamman, 2010).

Surgrue (2005) declares that teachers' professional identity has various aspects; therefore, it is a multi-dimensional term that includes all the crucial teaching profession characteristics. PI is correlated with new experiences and prior knowledge of a teacher; hence the affiliation of past and recent experiences makes the journey of a professional teacher towards success and achievements. This approach of PI helps teachers to maneuver from traditional teaching to improve their instructional practices and pedagogical skills. The concept of PI as the application of experience, strategies, proficiency and knowledge for the learning outcomes of the students is observed by Beara (2010). She indicates that, it is required that students and teachers collaborate to encourage the learning process and that teachers should have background information about the society's cultural and social environment so as to perceive and have the ability to deal with the cognitive approach of their students.

To sum up, the concept of teacher professional identity is complex and requires a large amount of research, as there is much to perceive if the topic of teacher identity is more appreciated, and looked into with a deeper thought. It is worth noting that current literature has arguments about the importance of providing attention to teachers' identities for various reasons.

It could be used as an analytic lens or a framework to examine the many aspects of teaching. Most of the studies are focused more on school teachers and elementary stage education rather than higher education. Their methods include narratives where teachers explain themselves and talk about their teaching, discourses where teachers produce or participate in, teacher observations by the researchers, surveys and questionnaires where teachers evaluate and reflect on their selves.

2.2 Communities of Practice (CoP)

In order to address the expectations of teachers and the exceptional working conditions, Loughran (2014) states that professional development must be intentionally conceptualized, insightfully implemented, and meaningfully utilized to support development and change (as cited in Patton & Parker, 2017). It is broadly acknowledged that being part of a community, a team or a network offers very powerful and dominant modes of professional improvement (MacPhail, Patton, Parker & Tannehill, 2014).

Barak, Gidron and Turniansky (2010) suggest that it is more beneficial and effective to learn with other members instead of learning individually. Members of each community can find support, reinforcement and challenges in each other's stories as participation in such communities provides teachers with a space for authentic stories and conversations (Figg, Gallagher, Griffin, Parker & Kitchen, 2011).

Learning with other members, provides teachers with experiences from others, gives a sense of familiarity and connection with the other members of the community. Further, the formation of learning is social, as it is delivered through significant discourse and discussions that happens inside communities (Barak et al., 2010). Therefore, this formation is not a linear

process, but it is a process where new thoughts, ideas and innovations emerge between people instead of within them (Hakkarainen, Lipponen & Paavola, 2004).

A large number of scholars, such as Dewey (1916), Lave and Wenger (1991), Schon (1983) and Vygotsky (1978) support learning as participation. Learning, in these situations, is assumed to be situated and social; regularly happening in informal or casual contexts such as communities through participation, accessing various contexts, communication and interaction (Maivorsdotter & Quennerstedt, 2017).

The concept of communities of practice (CoP) was originally proposed by Lave and Wenger in 1991. They referred to CoP as communities in which the participation of the members is through their sharing of their point of views regarding what they do, how they do it and its meaning for them in their lives. They suggested that participation is a learning process in CoPs as long as it is legitimate, as new members are introduced into practice and then this practice is developed into full participation. Subsequently, Wenger (1998) perpetrated an extensive theoretical improvement of CoP and suggested a social theory of learning. He found that there is a connection between the individual and the world while learning, which helps in enhancing the identity and the social structure construction.

Recently, the literature on communities of practice (CoP) has portrayed a promising theme in teachers' professional development (Bates & Swennen, 2010; Brody & Hadar, 2011). Nonetheless, CoP provides a substantial framework to examine teacher learning, despite its' various interpretations which makes it challenging to apply the notion in useful and meaningful ways. In one concept, CoP is defined as a social association in which learning and cooperation occurs (Boylan, 2010).

Wenger and Wenger-Trayner (2015), explain that CoPs are groups of people who share a passion or a concern towards something they do; a profession, and they learn how it is done better through their regular interaction. They illustrate that there are different combinations of these communities of practice as: “They come in a variety of forms. Some are quite small; some are very large, often with a core group and many peripheral members. Some are local and some cover the globe. Some meet mainly face-to-face, some mostly online. Some are within an organization and some include members from various organizations. Some are formally recognized, often supported with a budget; and some are completely informal and even invisible.” (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 3).

These different forms of communities fill various needs including increase in research productivity, professional learning, enhanced guidance and instruction (Boroko, 2004; Little, 2002; MacPhail et al., 2014). They also create a space for members to learn with and from each other by stimulating professional growth (Brody & Hadar, 2010). Communities of practice “seek to break down walls of solo practice” (Byrk, 2016, p. 469). Consequently, CoPs are not indiscriminate groups. They are rather purposeful, deliberate and revolve around genuine tasks. The professional learning process that they give is applicable and significant to each member (Parker, Patton, Madden, & Sinclair, 2010).

Wenger and Wenger-Trayner (2015) explain that communities of practice can be established and developed by three main elements; the domain, the community and the practice. To begin with, the domain alludes to a group’s identity characterized by a common area of interest. Members are committed to this domain, and thus “a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people” (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). Then, the community implies that its members seek after their interests through commitment and

engagement in meaningful discussions, deliberate activities, which facilitate learning from and with one another. Finally, the practice is regarded as a shared range of resources including tools, stories, experiences, and procedures of addressing any hindrances the group members may encounter. The creation and production of these resources takes a considerable amount of time and continuous interaction.

A variety of activities are implemented for the purpose of developing the practices of these communities. For example, problem solving, seeking experience from the other members, asking for information, building arguments with others, discussing one's development and identifying gaps and problems, coordination and increase of confidence. CoP generally helps in understanding the world in a better way, and brings to focus the problems that teachers face in their professional life with all the informal learning that is involved in the community.

Croiset, Beishuizen, Lankveld, Schoonenboom and Volman (2017) examines the processes in teaching courses and teacher communities that strengthen teachers' identities and help in their professional development. Findings show that both of the approaches; teacher communities and teaching courses increased the teachers' sense of competence, feelings of positivity towards their profession, and a feeling of connectedness developed with other teachers. They express self-appreciation, as well as the gratitude for being appreciated by others, and future career goals. The teachers explain that they feel more confident when they attend teacher communities or courses, as their competence is enhanced, and there is an increase in their self-esteem.

This study shows that both teacher communities and teaching courses add to medical teachers' professional identities as teachers in various ways. While teacher communities especially reinforce the teachers' identification with the teaching community, teaching courses

strengthened their identification with the profession itself. Furthermore, the two methodologies reinforced the teachers' feeling of competence. On an important note, professional development activities and communities of practice appear to be appropriate for the nourishment of teachers' intrinsic motivations for supporting their professional identity and preventing them from quitting.

A three-layered model concerning the effect of communities of practice on teachers is proposed by Brody and Hadar (2010). Each layer is a prerequisite to the following layer; the first one symbolizes isolation breakage. At this phase, space is created for professional and social interaction, safe discussions, and cross-area conversations bringing about the improvement of a group that could make proficient associations. This type of communication and teacher interaction with other teachers based on common issues prompts a second layer of well-developed teaching as well as research. Increase in competence and self-efficacy as well as professional learning regarding research and teaching determines the model's third layer.

Thus, Patton and Parker (2017) aim to explore physical teachers' awareness in regards to their participation in communities of practice, and its capability to help in their professional development. In this study, Wenger and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) three elements of community of practice is used; domain, community and practice. The study also reflects on Brody and Hadar's three-layered model (2010). Results indicate that being engaged in CoP gives an establishment to reduce isolation and encourage more collaboration between the teachers, enabling members to expand their teaching and research capacities. Teachers successfully established respect and genuine trust between each other, as they felt safe, connected and were willing to take risks. They also engaged in challenging discourse about creative instructional practices. As a result of this environment, they felt confident and intellectually challenged.

Collaboration with other teachers and motivation are usually enhanced when teachers join communities of practice. So, it is important to support teachers with resources that would motivate them and give them the opportunity of professional growth. Daniels, Durksen and Klassen (2017) explore the relation between teacher professional learning, self-efficacy and engagement. The study concludes that collaboration with other teachers and engagement in CoPs is a crucial influence for professional learning and efficacy, as self-efficacy affects the teacher's motivation and enthusiasm, persistence, job satisfaction, in addition to its influence on teaching behavior such as task perception, instructional practices and student achievement.

In order for teachers to continue working efficiently, teacher empowerment has been a significant issue. It helps teachers broaden their teaching skills and update their area of expertise knowledge (McLaughlin, 2002; Kao & Tsai, 2009). It has been gaining attention among researchers and practitioners because of its positive association with work-outcomes related to teachers, such as, teaching quality, job satisfaction, professional and organizational commitment, which alters classroom improvement and institutional effectiveness (Lee & Nie, 2014).

Several ways have been utilized to engage and empower teachers, for example, hiring experts to inform teachers about recent pedagogical insights or the best instructional practices for student learning. But this implementation has not been very successful as outside experts had little knowledge about local conditions. Recently, an increasing number of information and technologies (ICTs) have been executed for teachers' efficiency in classes and professional growth engagement. Among different ICTs for instruction, online communities of practice (CoPs) have become an important approach for teachers to improve their teaching skills and pedagogical knowledge (Johnson & Türel, 2012; Lee, Lin, Michko & Wu, 2013).

Kuo and Tseng (2013)'s study focuses their study on an online professional community for teachers. The data from interviews and self-reports show that close connection among the members lead to mutual concern and recognition / appreciation. Online CoP fosters teachers' willingness to help and cooperate with each other by solving instrumental and emotional problems as their sense of attachment is strong among their groups. Similarly, Hou (2014) explores the factors which positively contribute to online teacher CoPs.

His study results are similar to the previous study; teachers recognize the presence of others in transforming and supporting their learning, it also promotes feelings of appreciation and connectedness with other teachers. This type of empowerment and participation in online communities of practice is an essential key factor to make this professional community vibrant for professional growth. Moreover, self-efficacy views and performance expectations play fundamental roles participation and knowledge-sharing. While network ties might not significantly affect an individual's job performance expectations, an indirect link is found between performance expectations and the intensity of the tie through teachers' self-efficacy in knowledge sharing among each other, reflecting a more grounded interceding impact on online teacher members' knowledge sharing through their "prosocial" commitment for performance expectations and helping others.

This is in concurrence with the contention that interpersonal relationship plays a vital role in supporting achievement motivation and one's self-esteem (Dawson & Martin, 2009, as cited in Kuo & Tseng, 2013). Hence, with other members of the CoP through these network ties, the more prominent the teachers' effective convictions in having the capacity to give instrumental assets or emotional support to help other teachers, the higher probability of a constructive

evaluation of the job performance and the more information they wish to contribute in the online instructor proficient CoP (Kuo & Tseng, 2013; Hou, 2014).

To conclude, communities of practice studies show that CoPs do not isolate deliberate efforts of learning from genuine learning that is embedded in everyday practice for teachers. This non formal learning of CoP plays an essential part in the contribution of the community's character, and eventually, the teachers' professional learning quality. This type of social learning is a reciprocative process, whereas the learning that occurs during participation returns back to the community and influences imminent participation. Due to the fact that teachers frequently interact, their educational practice is shaped; they construct social virtues for their relations with other members, they learn to know which activities should be valued, and decide on the purpose of their joint work.

2.3 Teacher Perceptions

Lindsay and Norman (1977) describe perceptions as a process through which individuals interpret and compose their senses to create a significant encounter of the world. However, this understanding of the world may not be indistinguishable from the real world, yet this procedure of meaning exchange happens to shape teachers' perceptions. Kagan (1992) contends that, teachers attempt to understand their intricate world and they react to it by building up their very own beliefs about how students ought to learn and how teaching ought to be.

Likewise, Richardson (1996), states that teachers consider perceptions about their own professional practices and other teachers' practices as well. As a result, perceptions are vital elements of a teacher's identity since they are propulsive motives for their actions. When encountered with a particular situation, teachers decipher it into something that is important to them based on related experiences. Their view of what this situation is and how to manage it is

derived from their professional experiences and their personal ones too. Therefore, through dialogue and professional interaction, teachers' perceptions are developed (Lambert, 1998).

Teachers who participate in interactions and professional activities, such as attending workshops and conferences, joining online communities of practice or any other professional development activities, might improve their own understanding of teaching practices. Teachers' communications with their general surroundings, along these lines, shape their perspectives about themselves as well as other people (as cited in Salama, 2018).

Teacher mentalities and their beliefs regarding their professional identity and teacher learning are critical contemplations in order to understand how they see themselves as teachers, their perspectives regarding the characteristics of a good successful teacher and their classroom practices. Understanding these beliefs will help in conducting a well-designed teacher development / training programs and beneficial communities of practice to develop their thinking and practices. Teacher efficacy, professional improvement, the willingness and ability to adapt with educational change, as well as implementing variation and novelty in their teaching practices are also affected by their perceptions about their professional identity (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000).

Johnston, Johnson, Morgan and Varghese (2005) claimed that, researchers and educators need to find methods to perceive teachers in order to reach an understanding of teaching and learning. A standout amongst the most ideal methods for understanding teachers is by having a clear idea and a reasonable thought of who they are; their identity. This implies thinking about the diverse roles they play throughout everyday life, their concepts about themselves as persons and as professionals, as well as their students, the values they believe are essential for teaching

and learning, critical moments in their lives and so forth; in other words their self and their identities (Johnston, Johnson, Morgan & Varghese, 2005).

Beijaard et al. (2000) define '*teacher perceptions*' as "teachers' perceptions which, in our research, can be defined as representations of their understandings of their own professional identity ... we assume that teachers' perceptions of their professional identity reflect their personal knowledge of this identity" (Beijaard et al., 2000, p.750). Teachers' beliefs, molded to a great extent by socially shared encounters, might be hard to change, and that they are verifiable presumptions about teachers' roles, curriculum, subject matter knowledge, students' learning and teachers' roles (Thompson, 1992). Teachers' perception regarding themselves and their self-understanding is related to their professional identity (Kelchtermans, 2005).

Teachers' beliefs concerning pedagogical matters and instructional practices depend vigorously on experience and intuition; choices depend on the types of students and the exceptional classrooms restraints. Also, their perception of success is based on their students' effort, their active participation and interest because sparse commitment to learning and inactive participation usually leads teachers to express their frustration and discontent (Montgomery, 2012; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). Researchers believe that a teacher's enthusiasm, motivation and persistence are affiliated with their efficacy, which affects the performance of the students even if the students are unmotivated (Allinder, 1994; Evans-Palmer, 2010; Gusky & Passaro, 1994). Fraser (2011) states that, the teachers' perception of themselves influences their actions and is an important element in understanding their professional identity, which exists in the relationship between practice and thinking.

In order to understand how teachers perceive themselves and their professional identity, in-depth interviews and long extensive conversations were conducted with Art teachers by Bain,

Kuster and Young (2014). The participants are interviewed during the beginning of their career and then in their fifth year of teaching in this follow up study. Findings conclude that in the beginning of their career till recently, the teachers have a strong belief about their teaching philosophy and career choice. They explain that the main reason for becoming teachers is their aim for professional growth, commitment to their profession and satisfaction towards the field of teaching. The teachers also show self-confidence as they felt valued and appreciated by their institution and students, as well as by instructional practices and setting high expectations for their students. In addition, they believe that due to their professional experience, they have a high sense of efficacy as they could achieve their goals.

Ezer, Gilat and Sagee (2010) examine novice teacher perceptions about their education and its contribution to their professional identity. They collect their data by using a questionnaire that includes five aspects of the teaching profession; motivation, training, teacher role, teaching-learning conceptions and teacher education components. Findings show those teachers' views about the motivational aspects is that it grants intrinsic rewards. Also, teaching allows lifelong professional development and is perceived as it gives a sense of purpose and self-efficacy. Despite the usage of a questionnaire, the open-ended question might not be enough to get accurate data. An interview could provide detailed and in-depth answers which could help in understanding teachers' views and beliefs.

Despite the fact that teachers try to carry out their beliefs in class, the intricacy of institutional and sociocultural factors such as, school contexts, teachers' lives experiences, political and economic policies might restrain their practices. Therefore, research has discovered that the connection between teachers' beliefs and practices reliable or conflicting, in other words, consistent or inconsistent (Karathanos, 2009; Ozbarlas, 2008).

Chinese heritage language teachers' beliefs about instructional practices, curriculum and professional identity are examined by Field, Palmer and Wu (2011). Analysis show that the teachers developed a weak professional identity over the years, as they think that teaching Chinese is considered as a secondary or a volunteer job. Lack of teacher training, low pay and limited communication among colleagues constrained professional development as well. The teachers state that they wish the school would provide interesting appropriate textbooks and supplies. Additionally, they acknowledge the students' parents because they influence students' motivation and facilitate instruction. Chinese teachers create a friendly learning class environment in order to interact, motivate students and increase their talking time. As a result, the teachers feel that they are in need of professional training to develop their PI.

Since teachers' beliefs are related to teaching and learning, they are developed through a lifetime of encounters in classrooms. A nine-year longitudinal study that claims to fill the gap in the literature about teacher beliefs, investigates the beliefs of pre-service teachers and the changes over the years in those beliefs. This investigation includes their teacher preparation program time and then six years of teaching afterwards; it is also based on the researcher's (Wall, 2016) pre-program teacher beliefs investigation. To increase the study's reliability and to form categories and themes, qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed from questionnaires, interviews and surveys in four stages.

Findings reveal that the teachers initially believed that teaching is an easy simple profession, that teachers can act freely and individually, and that students have the same abilities if they are in the same grade. Later, their beliefs changed due to their teaching experience as they discovered that all students are different with different abilities and they need various teaching

styles with different instructional methods. They also believe that teaching is a complex profession that requires effort and could be restrained by external factors (Wall, 2018).

Torres and Weiner (2015) explored how young teachers in charter schools shaped their professional identity by their views of teaching and teachers, teaching experience, preparation and their histories. The researchers used literature that concentrated on the formation of identity, specifically Wenger's (1998) five dimensions of identity. Results reveal that the participants choose to work in charter schools as it constructs their professional identity and they did not view themselves as traditional public-school teachers. It makes them dedicated and connected to their profession, highly skilled and competent. Further, teachers understand and believe that teaching is a noble profession and a valuable job. They also seek teaching communities that enhance teaching skills and have high standards for the sake of their professional development and to benefit their own students.

Lee (2012) examines how writing teachers construct and perceive their professional identities through interviews and classroom research reports. The study defines PI as in the way teachers talk about themselves, their practices and their roles. The researcher concludes that the writing teachers develop commitment and enthusiasm after taking a writing teacher education course (WTE). It empowered them to see their roles differently as writing teachers, gives them clear writing task perception and in-class practices. They feel committed and associated to their students and their profession.

Young teachers' perceptions of their professional identity, in regards to commitment to the profession, task perception and self-efficacy is explored (Engles & Lamote, 2010). Data is obtained from questionnaires targeting these factors; it is shown that the teachers believe that practical experiences within the classrooms caused a shift in their beliefs. Their task perception

and instructional practices involved and focused more on student involvement and discipline. Teachers explain that student engagement increases their self-confidence which, as a result, enhances their teaching skills, their belief in self-efficacy and commitment to their jobs and their students.

Finally, some of the studies showed that teachers, in the beginning of their career, had the thought that teaching profession is an easy job. However, after years of experience, these perspectives changed as it was realized that this profession is a hard demanding one. Also, teachers believed that participation in communities of practice would help in the development of their teaching practices, which subsequently, would help in the improvement of their students' overall academic achievement. Recently, online communities of practice have started to become popular among a large number of teachers. It has become an essential approach, as teachers consider it as a method to advance their teaching skills and pedagogical knowledge.

2.4 Conclusion

Professional identity depends on the reasoning and practices of individuals in their professional life, which influences their professional survival and maintains their professional statuses. It plays a vital role in the teaching profession, and as a result, it has great value in teacher training programs and communities of practice. Also, the impact of PI on the teaching profession improved the value of research in this angle. Teachers' PI implies that they must recognize their own status as educators, their duties and responsibilities. They should consider society's expectations as they play a significant role in building generations and the development of the society.

Moreover, a number of studies that were mentioned above investigated novice teachers who had little experience, while a very few of them investigated experienced teachers. I believe

that more research should be conducted on experienced teachers who work in higher education institutes, particularly in the humanities field as most of the studies are in the medical / science field. Also, few studies focused more on the ‘personal’ side of the teachers rather than the context and the professional side. It is critical to point out that because of the context of the studies, the results cannot be generalized. As mentioned before, this is due to the different cultures, different educational policies and systems, as well as convenient sampling.

Furthermore, although it is mentioned in all the previous studies that their instruments are valid and reliable, there are always some limitations to these methods. Surveys and questionnaires might obtain a limited set of data, although they might include open ended questions. While interviews would provide more information and self-reflection, some information might be selected or omitted due to dependence on long-term memory, and the influence of new experiences, events and people.

This chapter reviewed and outlined the literature about the main theme; professional identity of teachers and focused on their perceptions about it, the sociocultural factors that affect it, as well as the concept of communities of practice. Reviewing these studies, which examined all these factors and their effect on the teachers’ career and identity, show that no similar studies have been conducted in an Egyptian context, particularly on university teachers. So, this study will seek to fill this gap in an attempt to explore how those teachers view themselves, and how those sociocultural aspects influence the formation of their professional identity.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the methodological framework for this study. This study aims to investigate the perspectives of English instructors, who work in Egyptian private institutions, regarding their professional identity. It also aims to explore their viewpoints concerning communities of practice and its impact on their professional identity. This chapter will provide a description for the research design, participants in this study, the setting, the instrument that will be used, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.

3.2 Research Design

This is an exploratory study that adopts a qualitative approach for both data collection and analysis. This approach is adopted as the researcher aims to explore university teachers' beliefs and perceptions about their professional identity and communities of practice. Atieno (2009) states that a qualitative approach attempts to examine the entire situation with the aim of evaluating its intricacy and assure that the conclusion considers general and unique factors. Therefore, this research design is effective while studying and researching teacher identity issues, for this topic is changing, diverse and dynamic.

Johnson (2006) regards qualitative research as an adequate method to explain teachers' views about their professional identity and its numerous dimensions. Additionally, Lee (2013) adopted a qualitative approach in his study to explore the ways teachers talk about themselves and their practices. He claims that it sheds light on their professional identities and provides useful information about the factors that influence PI and their practices. Also, Xu (2013) declares that individual interviews are used in his research for eliciting teachers' personal experiences and exploring how these experiences are understood from a personal viewpoint.

Accordingly, this study uses a qualitative methodology with the intention of attaining a better understanding of the study settings. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, qualitative data provides an in-depth and detailed examination, as its analysis is based on recording feelings, attitudes and behaviors. It encourages participants to talk freely, as it is based on their views and experiences.

3.3 Participants

For the purpose of answering the research questions, the researcher should decide on the suitable setting and participants, in order to obtain the needed information for the data collection. Taking this into consideration, teachers who participated in this study were mostly experienced in the phenomena being investigated; identification with their professional identity and the impact of communities of practice.

Convenience sampling was employed to recruit the participants in this study. It included 26 English instructors who work in private universities. The entire sample of instructors involved full-timers who are either MA Holders or studying towards a Masters / PhD degree. Their age ranged from 24 to 40 years old and their teaching experience varied from one another. All the participants were Egyptian female English instructors as finding male instructors was extremely hard. However, gender is not investigated in this study and the researcher listed this issue in the study limitations.

Table 3.1. Includes the participants' profile and the relevant demographic information. Initials are used to protect their identity and keep their data confidential.

Table 3.1. Participants' Profile

Context	*Name	Age	Years of Experience	Educational Background
Context 1	LK	31	10	MA degree
	MA	32	5	MA degree
	MK	31	10	MA degree
	MS	29	7	MA degree
	MB	29	9	MA degree
	RA	31	8	MA degree
	RH	39	11	MA degree
	RS	30	6	BA degree
	ST	31	10	BA degree
	WA	29	8	MA degree
Context 2	YK	31	10	BA degree
	SS	25	4	MA degree
	SF	39	3	MA degree
	AT	31	10	MA degree
	DA	30	6	MA degree
	EF	33	8	MA degree
	GH	30	10	MA degree
	GM	30	10	MA degree
	KT	26	4	MA degree
	LS	24	3	MA degree
Context 3	NW	32	11	MA degree
	SM	29	7	MA degree
Context 4	HT	32	10	PhD degree
	FA	29	8	PhD degree
	HS	35	14	MA degree
	SK	34	10	BA degree

3.4 Data Collection Methods

3.4.1 Instruments

As reported by Edwards and Holland (2013), in-depth and semi-structured interviews are crucial forms of qualitative research. This is due to the flexibility that the participants and researchers experience while using this type of interview, instead of the structured interviews. More specifically, it provides flexibility for clarification and following a line of inquiry. Interviews are usually chosen by researchers “to get multiple perspectives, augmented by documentary sources of evidence” (Judger, 2016, p. 2).

Respectively, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to collect self-reported data from the university instructors. The individual interview questions mainly targeted the participants’ perspectives about their professional identity, the different elements that impact this identity and communities of practice concerning teaching and learning. The interview consisted of 16 questions that were divided into four sections. The first section included five questions that focused on the instructors’ educational and professional background and teaching experience. The second section included four questions about perceptions of the teachers’ own PI and the factors affecting it. The third section included four questions which tapped into the instructors’ views about CoP and its effect on their PI. Finally, the fourth section included three questions that explored the instructors’ future goals regarding their career and professional growth.

Additionally, focus group interviews were conducted with four groups of instructors in order to produce data based on group collaboration and interaction. Focus groups could enlighten the distinction in viewpoints between groups of individuals and could also come up with diverse information about feelings, thoughts and ideas that the participants have about specific issues

(Rabiee, 2004). It consisted of seven questions that explored the instructors' professional identity and communities of practice viewpoints, benefits of CoPs and their effect on the instructors, teaching attitudes and behavior / practices, as well as their future career plans.

As previously mentioned, the interview questions which targeted the two main research questions, required detailed responses from the participants. Seven questions were adapted from Torres and Weiner (2016) and two questions were adapted from Yilmaz (2016). However, some questions were modified by the researcher to suite the nature of the research study, while the rest of the questions (six questions) and the focus group interview questions were created by the researcher.

3.4.2 Procedures of Data Collection

1. Ethical Consideration: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at the American University in Cairo was obtained before data collection because the study involved human participants. Through an online website, the IRB application was required to be filled in and then, the Chair of the IRB sent a signed approval to the researcher's email. Concerning the instructors' participation in the study, a verbal and a signed consent were obtained before each interview. Individual participants were asked to sign a consent form and it was assured and guaranteed that their participation is voluntary and entirely optional, as well as it was allowed for them to withdraw for any reason and at any time.

Accordingly, all the participants were informed about the research objectives and a brief explanation for the topic. They were also reassured that their identities (names) and recordings were kept anonymous and dealt with on a highly confidential basis, as well as their responses and answers were utilized for the objectives of the study and academic purposes only.

2. Procedures: The individual interview consisted of semi-structured and open ended questions that required detailed responses. As a result of the participants' busy schedules, the interview questions were sent via email that requested their answers and follow up questions were sent in the case of briefly answered questions. Consequently, focus group interviews were conducted face to face and took place on campus (library study rooms and offices). All the group interviews were audio recorded and each recording started with the group's verbal consent and the interview lasted for approximately 30-35 minutes. The researcher selected the instructors who participated in the focus group interviews carefully as it was important that they were in the same "age range, have similar socio-characteristics and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other" (Richardson & Rabiee, 2001). According to Krueger (1994), it is recommended that the participants should have common characteristics, such as age range, gender and social class background (Krueger, as cited in Rabiee, 2004).

3. Data Analysis Techniques: The data gathered from the interviews was transcribed by the researcher and then analyzed by using the thematic analysis approach. In order to assist the progress of the qualitative data analysis, the responses gathered were analyzed and different themes were produced.

All the relevant texts and data were collected after reading the participants' responses for the individual interviews. The researcher divided the interviews according to the four contexts. The relevant texts were combined in one Microsoft Word document and the focus group interviews were transcribed and combined in another document. The researcher coded relevant data with two colors for the main two themes, and four different colors for the sub-themes. Then, these themes were compared.

One emerging theme was generated and partially redirected the first research question as it included essential viewpoints of the participants. The three elements that affect teachers' professional identity; appreciation and connection, self-efficacy and competence, future trajectories and career goals will be used to analyze the first section of the interview regarding university instructors' PI. These elements were concluded by Croiset, Beishuizen, Lankveld, Schoonenboom & Volman (2017). However, the second section will be analyzed according to Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trayner (2015) communities of practice theory.

The Croiset et al. and Wenger's frameworks were used as they included the main elements that affect a teacher's professional identity, and these elements are associated with being a member of a community that involves university instructors. Supposedly, this community should provide recognition to a teacher's competence, sense of connection and appreciation, and the ability of imagining future goals. Based on Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trayner (2015) frameworks, it is essential to build a community that gives the teachers the opportunity to recognize and identify various issues, as well as support each other.

3.5. Theoretical Frameworks

3.5.1 Professional Identity

Van Lankveld, Schoonenboom, Volman, Croiset, and Beishuizen (2017) identified four main factors that affect a teacher's professional identity. The first factor is self-efficacy and competence; how teachers recognize their own competence and how others, such as their supervisors and their institutions, recognize it as well. They claim that it is a key indicator in strengthening a teacher's PI as the recognition of competence by others is extremely crucial for a teacher's self-confidence. They also state that teachers who are neglected, and whose teaching

efficacy is not recognized by their institutions are often reluctant and struggling with their professional identity.

The second factor is appreciation and connection towards a teacher's work rather than personal merits. Appreciation from colleagues, superiors and even students has a great impact on a teacher's professional identity. They argue that this sense of appreciation confirms the identity of the teacher. Subsequently, appreciation leads to connection with other teachers and connection to one's own institution, which forms a shared enterprise and creates mutual trust. Teachers sharing experiences with their colleagues and facing common issues, enhances their formal relations and mutual trust, as well as validates their professional identities as teachers.

The third factor is future trajectories and career goals. Teachers should be able to imagine their future and set plans to enhance their professional identities based on their educational merits. Envisioning themselves and setting clear career goals helps in strengthening their PI and encourages them to learn about teaching in various ways, such as pursuing their MA and PhD degrees, obtaining additional diploma certificates, joining and presenting at conferences. All the mentioned above plans broadens teachers' career aspirations and opportunities.

Van Lankveld, Schoonenboom, Volman, Croiset, and Beishuizen (2017) argue that these factors are associated with membership of a community of practice for teachers. They state that membership in these communities provide teachers with the sense of connection and appreciation, the recognition of a teacher's competency and efficacy, as well as future plans. These communities of teachers provide support for each other, which create a sense of belonging and connectedness. Below, figure 3.2 shows factors underlying university teachers' professional identity.

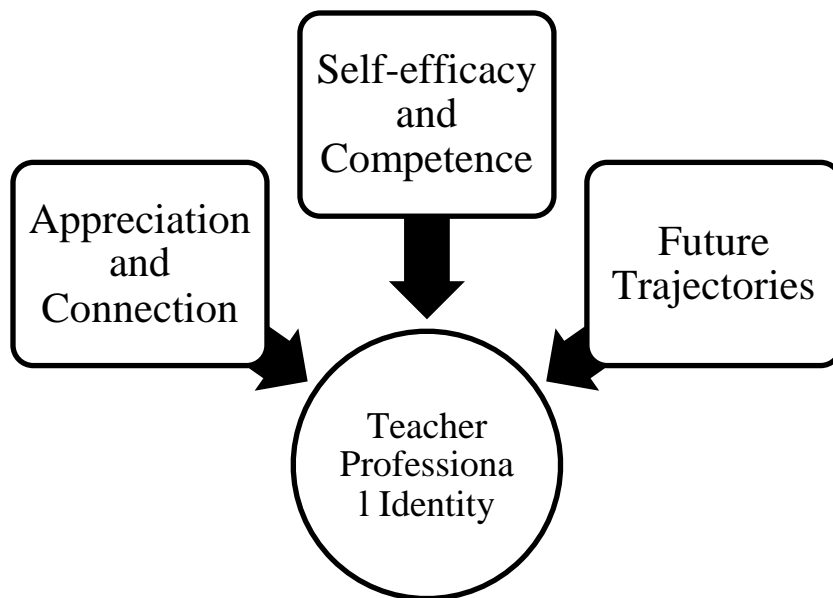


Figure 3.2 An analysis framework illustrating the three factors of teachers' professional identity.

3.5.2 Communities of Practice

The primary focus of Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning is that he considers this type of learning as a social participation in communities of practice. Participation is referred to being "active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities...such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do" (Wenger, 1998). He considers this participation as a form of belonging and a type of an action.

Wenger (1998) claims that, what teachers learn in communities of practice, becomes part of their professional identity, and is also elevated in other parts of their lives. He states that CoPs are resources for developing the teachers' learning in order to show their learning through an identity of participation. It also shapes their trajectories and broadens their overall experience. Thus, these communities have to be genuinely functional and significantly associated with the real world since these events / meetings can be designed and planned as opportunities to expand their learning, and could be one of the resources to the teachers' practices. Wenger considers

engagement in these communities as a type of a learning experience in which learning and identity serve each other.

A social relationship is an essential ingredient for learning and engagement in teacher communities of practice. The enterprise of a CoP is being involved in genuine learning and practices, mutual engagement in activities and continuous participation to elevate shared practices in order to build complex social relationships. As a result, teachers could control their learning process through shared experiences and practices rather than theoretical materials only (Wenger, 1998).

A community of practice is defined as a “joint enterprise, shared repertoire, and mutual engagement” (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). Recently, Wenger-Trayner (2015) consider these communities as social measures of discussing competence and efficacy in a certain domain. These measures facilitate establishing social relationships among members of these communities who are involved together in various ways. Three essential elements are required to be present in order to form a community of practice; the domain, the community, and the practice. In figure 3.3 the three elements for a CoP are illustrated.

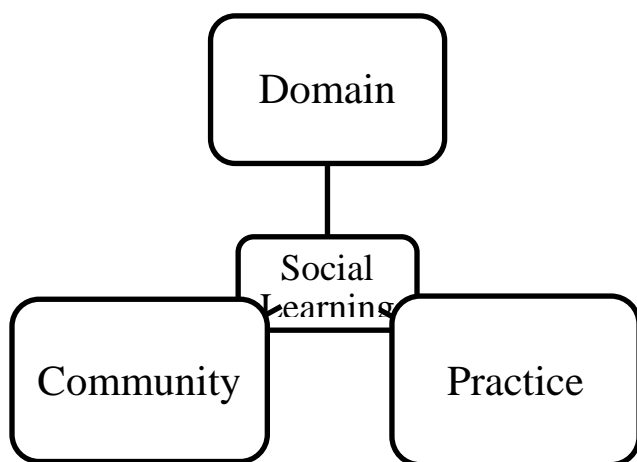


Figure 3.3 An analysis framework illustrating the three basic elements of communities of practice.

First, a domain is the identity of the group of individuals who are members of this community. It is defined by a shared domain of interest, such as teaching profession. Being a member requires the individual to be committed to the domain; hence mutual competence which distinguishes those members from other people occurs. In other words, Wenger-Trayner (2015) used the term ‘domain’ to define the field in which a community claims validity to refer to competence.

Second, in pursuance of their interest in their domain, relationships are built between members in order to form a community. They help each other by sharing information, knowledge and experiences. They engage in activities and discussions where they negotiate their competence. Therefore, social engagement and interaction between members, who should always be active, must occur in order to have an operative community.

Third, a CoP is not only a group of people who meet regularly to discuss issues, but they are a group of practitioners. They create a “shared repertoire of resources”, for example, stories, experiences, tools and techniques of addressing common problems. For instance, in the course of these discussions and conversations, these members develop a plethora of cases and stories that becomes a “shared repertoire for their practice” (Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2).

Accordingly, for the purpose of constituting a community of practice, these three elements must exist. While CoPs include these three elements, they also unfold in a variety of forms. For example, some are very large groups with main members and many peripheral participants, while others are remarkably small groups. Some of them meet face to face on a regular basis while others meet online. Some are formal communities, like formal meetings and workshops and some are informal, like casual conversations.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the results are presented based on the individual interviews and focus group interviews data analysis. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 address the two research questions of the study; Egyptian teachers' perceptions of their professional identity and to what extent is a teacher's professional identity affected by communities of practice. Section 4.2 illustrates the various teachers' perceptions and aspects of their professional identity. Section 4.3 illustrates the different perspectives of the teachers regarding communities of practice (CoP), its benefits to their professional development, and their CoP experiences.

4.2. Egyptian Teachers' Perceptions of their Professional Identity

Data extracted from the interviews revealed the first main theme which is teacher professional identity and perceptions regarding this identity. Five sub-themes emerged; teacher role, competence, future trajectories, appreciation and connection. The first four sub-themes are adapted from Croiset, Beishuizen, Schoonenboom, Van Lankveld and Volman (2017). While the fifth one is a new theme that emerged during the interviews, according to the teachers' viewpoints.

4.2.1. Teacher Role

According to most of the instructors' perceptions in the focus groups, the teacher role inside and outside class was the first aspect to be mentioned. This role included essential characteristics that should be present in any teacher such as, flexibility, patience, fairness, dedication and positivity (positive attitude).

The instructors highlighted the importance of flexibility in the teaching profession as they explained that it is needed inside and outside the class. They mostly mentioned that it is a choice made by the teacher whether to be extremely formal and rigid with the students or to maintain a good relationship with them; to be approachable and professional at the same time as AT mentioned:

“I also think that how the teacher interacts with his/her students differs. As some teachers prefer to do it in a very strict manner – to put limits and to maintain respect as their number one priority – other teachers want to do it in a very friendly way – to build that strong communication network and getting to know their interests. Sometimes you can also tailor your lessons according to the student interests”

GH and RS pointed out that “flexibility” is reflected on the teacher-student relationship and that it affected the teacher’s performance throughout the semester:

“I think the most important aspect of a teacher’s identity is the kind of character that they assume in a classroom. So, they either choose to be a flexible character or someone who is very rigid and I think this influences your performance throughout the whole semester.”

“For me, I believe that teachers should have this background where they are flexible when it comes to dealing with students inside and outside the class. They also have to be understanding and friendly but not a friend as there has to be limits.”

The participants’ responses in all the four focus group interviews indicated that in order to have a good relationship with one’s students, it is crucial to be friendly and professional at the same time. Some teachers explained that in order to maintain a respectable relationship with the students, as much as the teacher needed to be friendly, it is also recommended that there should be limits set from the beginning. GM stated that she was given a piece of advice from an older experienced teacher, that it is always best to be firm during the first week of the semester in

order to make the students comprehend that the teacher is the one who is in control of the class, as mentioned below:

“She told me that I can always be friendly and I can show them my friendly side later in situations. But, by the first day, they need to know that I am the person in power position and I have to project a very strict facade, not a bad one but a strict one. So, later on, project the sweet kind friendly approachable person but at the beginning I need to set the tone so that they know that this is university specially that we are dealing with freshmen.”

She further argues that this is due to the generation gap and for the reason that students need to understand that university instructors are different from school teachers. Other participants in another group mentioned the same perspective; it is vital that no limits are passed by the students and that a professional impression is given at first. In other words, teachers need to keep a distance between them and their students in order to maintain mutual respect.

“I like being professional with the students. I maintain a nice relationship, yes we’re friendly and so on but there is this distance between the teacher and students whether inside or outside the class. Because of this, I think you do deliver your job more effectively and nothing affects your job.”

“Well, I agree with Lobna. I like being professional whether in class or outside of class. Whenever I run into them even when we finish the course, I stay professional. Yes, there is rapport, I am approachable whenever they need anything but they never cross the limit of the teacher-student relationship because once they cross it, there is no coming back.”

Moreover, it is noted by several participants that flexibility has to be present inside and outside the classroom, as it gives the students the impression that they have a trustworthy teacher that could be approached for academic issues or even personal problems. SM and ST had the same perspective as their fellow participants in the group interview. One of them claimed that a teacher’s professional identity has two sides; one inside the classroom and one outside. They are integrated in the way a teacher treats their students, as the students will be able to approach their

teacher for both, academic and personal issues. The other participant stated that it is important for her to support the students and treat them well, while keeping a distance.

Other participants explained that flexibility does not only include a teacher's relationship with their students. It also includes the teacher's flexibility in their teaching techniques. DA states that teaching is a demanding profession and requires one to be up to date with the different teaching techniques that will serve students' needs. She explained that a teacher's professional identity should include an essential trait, which is the flexibility to incorporate the latest teaching techniques and activities in one's teaching skills. The reason for that is the possibility of having advanced / active students that need extra effort. So, it is important for the teacher to consider new ideas and trends in the teaching field.

"I believe that a professional teacher should have a couple of traits; one of them is flexibility to get to know new teaching techniques and activities, that is out of his/her comfort zone. Meaning that, all of us can teach traditionally, but sometimes the students are bored or advanced, sometimes they are more active. So teachers have to be flexible and open to get to know whatever is new and trending, and they need to incorporate this in class."

Most of the teachers stated in the individual interviews that they prefer to have a flexible relationship with their students. They highlighted that it is important to be humane with their students and to try to understand their different personalities as this helped to create a friendly atmosphere inside the class, as well as it affected the teacher's motivation:

"I usually have a friendly relationship with my students, as I always like to know about their interests and what they are passionate about."

"I have a very friendly attitude towards my students. I invest in building rapport with them, and I believe this helps them be more motivated."

Some of the participants explained that they usually felt that they are more than a teacher for the students. Some of them said that they become friends with them after the semester is over and that their students still contact them to the present day. This highlights the idea of being a trustworthy approachable teacher that students would come to for not only academic issues but personal issues as well:

“I feel that I am more than a teacher to them. They consider me a friend or an older sister. I could sense this because the first learners I taught are still in contact with me now. We hang out together and some of them call to consult me about some decisions.”

“However, once the semester comes to an end, we can exchange phone numbers and even FB accounts and we keep in touch...this happens selectively of course.”

However, a number of participants stated that they preferred to establish a formal relationship with their students, as teacher-student relationship needed to have boundaries and rules so that the students would fully comprehend that the teacher is the one in power.

“I try to be nice with students and helpful. However, I do not befriend them; I keep a formal professional distance.”

“I think I have a pretty good relationship with most of my students. I believe in the humanitarian approach and I totally support the social constructivism theories. I try to be as friendly as possible but yet set boundaries of mutual respect.”

Participants explain that it is essential to keep a safe distance between the teacher and the student because it is possible that students, at that young age, would misunderstand a certain action and might take the teacher for granted in future situations inside or outside the classroom. Consequently, this was mentioned in most group interviews as the teachers discussed various situations that required them to adopt this professional attitude. An example of these situations was the small age gap, lack of experience or the different social backgrounds. SS explains that due to her young age, she feels the need to be strict with her students in order to maintain a

respectable relation and to avoid inappropriate actions taking place inside or outside the classroom:

“I am usually the authoritative kind of a teacher. The reason why I would describe myself as such is because of my age. I always fear that students would underestimate me because I look young. I fear they will take advantage of me being friendly or tolerant. Students test teachers’ waters. So even if a teacher looks young, and that is okay, teachers would still need to sound firm and ‘experienced’ and set out classroom rules from the very first start.”

DA stated that there were two main reasons for adopting a formal attitude in the beginning of her career; lack of experience and the small age gap. She said that she used to have an extremely formal relationship with her students because she lacked self-confidence and was not certain enough that she could deliver lesson objectives easily. She also mentioned that she was not much older than her students and wanted to assure that they took her classes seriously. It is further explained that this attitude changed due to the gain of experience while dealing with different types of students and facing various situations.

“At the beginning, my relationship with my students was extremely formal because I was not yet so sure of myself and whether I am able to easily deliver the information. The age was also another reason because the age gap between the students and me does not pass 5 or 6 years so I wanted to make sure they are taking the class seriously. After some time, I started to be myself more and the relationship became more casual and friendly.”

The second characteristic that should be present is fairness. A participant pointed out that it is important for the students to feel that they are treated fairly by the teacher. As some teachers might have a favorite student or might prefer certain students over others, which is usually reflected on the teacher’s attitude and treatment. For example, allowing particular students to dominate class discussions. Remarkably, a teacher’s role consists of being an authority figure,

evaluator, advisor and exam administrator which might lead to ethical dilemmas if not done right.

Although some teachers might expect their students to be mostly concerned with the learning outcomes or fairness of procedures as it might affect their grades, some participants declared that students appreciate “interactional fairness”. This interactional fairness refers to the essence of the teacher-student interaction which incorporates respect, integrity, concern and equal treatment for all the students. As a result, it is usually preferable that a teacher monitor their own behavior inside the class in order to treat all the students equally:

KT: “Being fair, at one point a student feels that they aren't treated fairly. This makes the relationship very difficult to manage and it actually spreads among the class. So, being fair is very important but being flexible as well. Some people want to become fair so instead they become very strict and very rigid but you don't want to scare them off and you need to put in mind that you're dealing with human beings.”

The third characteristic according to the teachers' responses was patience. They stressed on the importance of this feature from two points of view. First, some teachers explained that because of the differences in the learning styles between the students and their different personalities as well, it is crucial to act patiently with them. For example, if a student takes more time in doing an exercise or if the teacher expects the students to finish a certain assignment within a specific timeframe and they do not. It is important to accept the idea of having multiple intelligences inside the class because the students might have different capacities of comprehension. It is very diverse as some students are visual learners, while others might be auditory learners, and some students might be slower than others.

In the group interviews, the participants discussed the patience feature. They mentioned the different situations that teachers would face inside the class and the amount of patience they were required to project upon their students. They stated that patience is a critical quality that a

teacher should possess; being patient inside the class when the students are doing an exercise as it should be in mind that some students' progress / pace might be slower than their peers'.

Furthermore, teachers need to be objective in some situations because students might behave in a particular way which requires a certain amount of patience and flexibility.

WA: "I believe something that is very important is patience, being able to be objective when it comes to issues that happen in class or thinking that something is easy because you think it's easy and then you have to realize that for this person it is not."

MS: "I do believe that this type of patience, as you mentioned, is very important. You might find a student that would get the concept which you introduced inside the class from the first time. While some of them might need reinforcement for once or twice and others need to practice to understand well."

Second, other participants stated that it was important to be patient, remain calm and act civil with misbehaving / disrespectful students or students who have negative attitudes. They explained that the way a teacher approaches their students should be highly regarded as any wrong decisions taken might create future problems. The following responses are examples from the group interviews:

LK: "Yes, patience is very important...being positive towards students, this is a very important quality, not giving up on students saying that all students are bad, all of them are disinterested and nothing is beneficial."

WA: "I think the first part of a teacher's identity is the way she deals with students inside the classroom. For example, how they greet the students, how they allow the students to approach them if they have issues and how they approach the students when they see something that they don't like."

The fourth and final characteristic mentioned by the participants was being a role model to one's own students. It is critical for a teacher to treat their students fairly, as previously mentioned, in order to maintain a positive teacher-student relationship. It was mentioned that teachers need to cautiously deal with their students as at such a young age, they are easily

influenced. Showing a sense of responsibility, having mutual respect and understanding, caring about their academic performance, and even choosing the appropriate language used with the students is extremely vital in order to be an inspirational role model and a guide rather than just a teacher.

MA: “Yes, like punctuality and even the language choices, the way you speak to them and what you say, everything influences them. Students usually parrot their teachers and imitate what their teachers do. So, teachers have to be role models, they also have to be emotionally intelligent to be able to control their own emotions whether these emotions are those of anger, joy or whatever and how to read the students’ own emotions or to interpret them correctly.”

Furthermore, a number of participants declared that it is important for a teacher to understand that their students are human beings who have their own lives and interests as well. Hence, it was indicated that being a dedicated teacher and having a positive attitude would always reflect on the students’ attitude in general. It helped in maintaining a good relationship in the classroom and creating a productive learning environment. Also, as indicated below, teaching is a demanding job that requires a teacher’s devotion in order to satisfy the teacher’s role and the students as well.

RS: “...to be satisfied, to be happy and interested in teaching. To be passionate about what they are doing. Because if you don't love what you do, I believe that you will not give it all the capabilities that you have.”

WA: “I believe that a teacher should be a positive happy person to give this positive vibe to the students. It is important to have this smile on your face during class time, and making sure that if you lose it for whatever reason that you do not replace it with a frown so the students wouldn't feel that they are a burden, and that you are actually there for them.”

Finally, these were the most crucial characteristics that all the participants mentioned during the interviews. They claimed that these features should be existent in any teacher in order to sustain a good relationship with students. It is stated that a teacher’s role is important in students’ lives as the way they speak, react and behave could reflect on their students’ behavior.

It is also wise to leave a positive impression on the students as this delivers a good message to them, and creates a positive learning environment.

4.2.2. Competence (Self- efficacy and instructional/teaching practices)

The second aspect of a teacher's professional identity mentioned by the participants is self-efficacy inside the class regarding their teaching practices, organization and management skills. To begin with, a number of instructors in the individual interviews were able to evaluate themselves and state their effectiveness inside the classroom. Each participant gave their own reasons for their self-efficacy and the effectiveness of their teaching practices. First, some participants stated that punctuality and showing responsibility to the students gives a good impression and inspires the students to adopt the same attitude. For example, respecting the assignment deadlines, coming to class and leaving on time and giving constant and regular feedback was mentioned:

GH: "Being very accurate, very specific with time, you've got to respect time and this should be part of yourself. You respect time with deadline, with planning your course and your lesson, coming to class on time, leaving on time not keeping the students too much or making them leave too early. This really shapes and gives sort of an impression of how things will fold throughout the semester. So like being respectable of time, being time conscious is really part of what shapes your identity as a teacher."

NW: "punctuality is an excellent attitude and quality."

SF: "I also like to give very extensive feedback to help students understand how to overcome the gap in their performance."

The participants explained that their self-efficacy is reflected in their manners and their behavior. Showing the students the importance of respecting time, such as coming to class on time, leaving on time or even giving feedback according to schedule, gives them an idea of how things will be established throughout the semester. It could establish certain rules, unintentionally, such as the importance of being punctual and accurate.

Second, the instructors believed that another reason for their self-efficacy was being knowledgeable especially in the subject being taught. The participants explained that part of a teacher's knowledge reflects on their good preparation for the lesson objectives and the materials used inside the classroom. It could be shown in the teacher's awareness of all the points that needs to be covered, the unexpected questions from certain challenging students or the explanation of a specific point. GH explained in the group focus interview that in order to be an effective teacher and leave a good impression on one's own students and fellow teachers as well, one must be knowledgeable:

GH: "I also agree with what they said. When I think about professional identity for a teacher, I think in terms of what is the amount of information you know, how much do you know and how much do the students think that you actually know. This really helps shape your identity in front of them and in your own eyes and in the eyes of your colleagues."

Third, another reason mentioned for the self-efficacy of a teacher was the students' performance. It was explained by several participants that they were able to evaluate their effectiveness as teachers by their students' progress throughout the semester. They stated that the students' progress is shown in their performance on different tasks given by the teacher, on quizzes and exams:

MA: "I'd also consider myself an effective teacher based on the students' performance in the exams as well as their performance while conducting any form of formative assessment."

LK: "...also, I can touch the students' progress through their class performance and exams."

HT: "I think am somehow effective. I see that even with the writing courses. At the beginning they don't know how to write, for example, an essay but at the end they start writing it correctly, their grammar, their structure and writing style is improved and they fulfill the requirements at the end."

One of the instructors clarified that she was able to notice that her students managed to practice English outside the classroom. She explained that this is one of the reasons that made her believe that she is an effective teacher, as she was able to notice the progress in their performance, especially outside the class.

GH: “I have seen actual progress of students over the semesters I taught. And even within the same semester, you can evaluate the progress through their performance on the various tasks. Apart from improvements in their grades, I can sense and notice their attempts to use language inside and outside the class, and that is for me a good indicator, not just of their overall proficiency-wise progress, but also of how much they enjoy my classes, and how much effort they are willing to put.”

Fourth, several participants expressed that they could not assess their self-efficacy and effectiveness as teachers and commented that it depended on the evaluation and feedback from their supervisors, peers and students. During the semester, in some of the higher education institutions, mentors / supervisors usually observe the teachers in their class to assure standardization. Observations and class visits are a way of evaluating a teacher’s teaching techniques, instructional practices and student-teacher interaction. Consequently, feedback is given to the teacher in order to direct attention to the points of strengths and weaknesses.

SM: “It is difficult for a teacher to assess her/his own performance. However, I had a good score in teachers’ assessment. Also, I have received positive feedback after class monitoring sessions.”

KT: “it is very difficult for a teacher to rank their own effectiveness which is why they need mentors, peers, and students to give them honest feedback and advice.”

By the end of each semester, students evaluate and comment on the teachers’ performance, the material used and the subject / course. Some institutions fully depend on the students’ evaluation of the instructor, while other institutions depend more on the mentors’ and supervisors’ assessment. Some teachers regard those comments as a type of constructive

feedback that allows students' engagement in the teaching-learning process. The participants also believed that it is a foundation for a positive teacher-student relationship as it shows the students that their instructor is concerned about them and their learning process. It is stated in the following responses by the participants that they usually prefer to take into consideration their own students' comments regarding their teaching style.

MK: "I think based on most of my students' evaluations and feedback, I'm pretty effective in building rapport with the students, motivating them to explore and utilize their abilities to the maximum."

SK: "Throughout my teaching years, I have received dozens of positive comments from both my students and superiors about my performance as a teacher."

WA: "I would say that I am an effective teacher. I say that because I put the students' interest at heart, and because I always make sure to listen to what they think about my teaching techniques."

Teachers, who considered the students' comments on their own teacher's teaching style and instructional practices, persuaded them to closely observe their students. This observation resulted in providing the students with the appropriate material that suits their needs and learning styles. It also helps weak students with extra activities and material given by the teacher. One of the participants mentioned that they mostly felt effective when their students gave them positive feedback, especially when the students gained skills that helped them in their practical life later on.

SS: "I feel that I am an effective teacher because I implement a variety of activities to guarantee that all students have grasped and totally understood a lesson. I also try to motivate students, which adds to the effectiveness and professionalism of a teacher."

YK: "I feel effective as I always add extra material along with the material that I have to teach. I make sure I am a helpful guide to my students even outside the classroom. I always provide my students with any help they need addressing different problems they face with certain skills."

LK: “When I used to teach general English courses, I could see that I was very effective. They start with a very low level of English and by time, they are improving and this had a direct effect on them while going to apply for a job or so on. And, I could see that I was effective as I can see the feedback from them, so they used to thank me and tell me that it was a beneficial experience and that I was a helpful teacher.”

Another point that was linked to self-efficacy was the teachers’ organization skills, decision making and problem solving. These three skills were mainly linked to preparation and teaching experience. All the participants in the individual interviews, as well as the focus group interviews claimed that organization is associated with competent and thorough preparation. It included time management, ahead of time material preparation, lesson plans, excel sheets for grading students’ assignments, clear instructional practices and multitasking skills. They explained that the students are usually aware if the teacher is well prepared or not, which affects the teacher’s image and self-confidence.

AT: “mostly the organization skills would fall under the idea of knowing how to do many things at the same time... multitasking as in correction, lesson preparation and conferences arrangement.”

DA: “For sure if you are well prepared, then you are organized. Like the more settled you are the more organized you will be throughout the semester. For example, thinking ahead of time like two weeks before the semester to prepare the material, the excel sheets for the grades or extra stuff.”

SF: “I think a teacher should be organized as well, like if we organize our time correctly, our lesson plan and material, everything will go smoothly in the classroom. So I think organization is a key point as well.”

NW: “Being organized and prepared this totally show to the students, if you aren’t prepared this is going to show.”

It is noted that teaching is a difficult and demanding profession that requires the teacher to develop the habit of good organization skills. This skill should include the ability of the teachers to organize themselves, their students and their classrooms. To illustrate, teachers

should always inform their students with the class rules from the beginning of the semester in order to keep the class organized, well managed and smooth. As previously mentioned, punctuality is crucial for both the teacher and the student. Leaving a good impression on the students reflects on them for the rest of the semester and gives them a sense of responsibility regarding their education, as well as their manners and role inside the classroom. Also, tutorial objective should be introduced at the beginning of the class as this attracts their attention, especially if a graded assignment is involved. In the following focus group discussion, the participants explain their perception of a teacher's organization skills:

RS: "What I do is that I prepare at least twice before the class, especially if it is a new subject for me to teach. I have to really comprehend all the points that I need to cover and be prepared in case a student asked me something that is irrelevant to the topic but it just relates somehow. Preparation is a very important part because without it the teacher will feel less confident and that will consequently affect the class management. If the student felt like, they have this sense, if you aren't prepared, covering everything and aware of what you are saying it gives a bad impression because most of the time they look up to you as a role model."

MS: "When I use my organizational skills, preparation will come first. But, most importantly after preparation it's very important to share the plan or the agenda with the students; this is part of my organizational skills. The first thing I do when I enter class is that I have to write the objectives first. This part is the most important part for me inside the class because once you start writing the word "Objectives" on the board; they all start to be very attentive."

RH: "I believe that a good teacher is a well prepared teacher. First, the teacher should have full comprehension of the material that he/she is going to teach, then prepare how they will convey or deliver this material to the students and finally as MS has mentioned the idea of how you are going to plan or organize the white board is really important because many of the students have visual memory, so what is written on the board will be cemented in their minds in a way or another."

Subsequently, problem solving and decision making were linked to teachers' organization skills. Some teachers related these two skills to the familiarity with their students;

being aware of the students' different characters and different learning styles is a crucial element that helps the teacher in taking a certain decision or finding a solution for a specific problem.

Moreover, in the following group interviews, the participants agreed with each other that decision making and problem solving are skills that are acquired by time throughout the teacher's career. They contended that these two skills are essential for any profession especially teaching, yet most of the teachers acquire these two skills through experience, trial and error.

Due to their involvement in various situations inside and outside the class, a decent amount of experience is gained. Some teachers stated that they worked individually and self-reflected upon the situations that they face with their students as GH:

GH: "I think the more I get familiar with my students, the more I get to know them, the easier it gets to make a decision. I can make an immediate decision inside the classroom, whether am going to use this task or I have to replace it with another one. I think it comes with experience and familiarity with the learners. As for problem solving, again yes this comes with experience but sometimes I have to write it down...sometimes when I write down what's bothering me, I am able to find a solution. I am able to analyze it and break it down, just try to address each issue on its own."

While other teachers in the group declared that they preferred to share their problems / class issues with other teachers, especially older or experienced ones. They explained that when a teacher shares any type of situation that they face with their students with other teachers, it is usually beneficial as one gets to see the situation from another perspective. It is also noted that teachers anticipate certain problems due to the experience factor and that the support that teachers give each other in the surrounding environment is crucial.

GM: "I also agree with the experience part, I think that discussing problems that are frequent with other teachers help you to be a little bit prepared. You sort of have an idea of how to deal with a situation before you're actually put in that situation where you have to deal with it on the spot. With decision making, sometimes while you're going with your lesson plan, you realize that the students are not up to an activity or they aren't

going with the pace you're expecting them to go and you have to take a decision to either make some changes to the task or maybe quit the task and start something else.”

In another group interview, the participants also mentioned that those skills are usually acquired through experience. Experience is usually required in certain situations, especially with students who have problems in their learning progression. It is important to make them feel comfortable among their peers and support them throughout the semester. It is also clarified that taking a certain decision or finding an immediate solution for an issue puts the teacher, to a great extent, under pressure. They state that it is vital to think before taking the right action because wrong decisions usually lead to disastrous results. Additionally, it reflects on the students' behavior and attitude later on.

MS: “Regarding problem solving, I feel like this is a skill that we acquire by experience. If you have a trouble maker inside the class or a student with a learning issue, he/she is different from the rest of the class, how are you going to deal with this problem so that they wouldn't feel that they are a special case or not normal. And, how at the same time you would make them feel that their performance is progressing.”

WA: “Now, the issue with decision making and problem solving that 90% of the time, we as teachers have to give the decision on the spot. This puts a lot of pressure on us. And, again as you said it comes with experience that you realize that sometimes you will have to give yourself time to be able to deal with a certain problem or give a certain decision but it depends on the situation of course.”

Moreover, a number of participants said that in order for a teacher to enhance their self-efficacy, they needed to be aware of all the modern teaching methodologies. They would attend workshops, training programs and conferences as it motivates them to focus on different teaching techniques and effective instructional practices. The implementation of these techniques would make the teachers understand their students more and be aware of what works and what does not with their different learning styles.

DA: “I am always keen on attending professional development events and conferences to be up-to-date with teaching methodologies, activities and trends that might be more effective for my students and thus would make me a more productive and effective teacher.”

FA: “I would like to think I am a good teacher, with plenty of room for learning new teaching techniques and development.”

MS: “I like to give myself the space to be a learner as well and am still developing and I have my areas of strength and the points that I need to reinforce.”

4.2.3. Future Trajectories

Fifth, future trajectories were another aspect of a teacher’s professional identity according to the teachers’ perceptions. When asked by the researcher about their future plans regarding their teaching career, most of the participants aspired to pursue their PhD degree as they were mostly MA holders. Some of them had already obtained other certificates concerning teaching in particular and education in general. These future goals show that teachers have a tremendous commitment to the teaching profession, genuine motivation for professional growth, improvement and self-efficacy.

The participants explained that teachers needed to constantly learn and be up to date with the latest teaching methodologies. They stated that students changed over time and nowadays the quality of the students is different as they are more involved with technology and are more aware of everything. As a result, it is critical to be more flexible and open to new techniques that could be implemented inside the classroom. In addition, studying the different learning styles of students, as well as, the different behaviors and issues is important. So, obtaining a formal / professional certificate was a major requirement for most of the participants.

The following quotes are examples of the participants' future career plans regarding their teaching profession:

AT: "I obtained a certificate after completing a course in blended learning held at AUC and I would like to obtain a PhD degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages"

DA: "I earned my MA in TESOL from the AUC. After the MA, I took the Professional Certified Trainer (PCT) certificate from the AUC and I am currently studying educational leadership and Human Resources (both are diplomas). I want to make sure to always be part of national and international conferences and PD events whether as a presenter or as an attendee."

FA: "After obtaining my PhD, I plan to attend more training programs related to teaching and training, like CELTA, FELT and TOT. Also, I will look for a Post-doc position in which I could both do research and teach in my specific field of research and interest."

HT: "I got a professional educator diploma and professional certified trainer certificate. I am planning to deepen and expand my knowledge about learning, pedagogy and methodology by embarking on a PhD in my field as the best teachers are those that never stop learning and continue striving to improve."

LK: "Yes. I took one from the AUC: Fundamentals of English Language Teaching (FELT). I'm intending to pursue my MA & PHD so that I can teach my major, Linguistics. It is important to pursue a career, develop yourself through training and courses and getting promotion to achieve one's goals."

MA: "Yes, I had a TEFL course. I am currently working on earning my MA degree. After that, I am planning to join a PhD program."

MK: "I'm planning to pursue my PhD degree in Education. I am also planning to continue in the teacher training career hoping to influence more teachers and show them how powerful they are in students' lives."

MB: "I am about to finish my masters in International and Comparative education for the AUC. I am planning to do my PhD in linguistics, something that has to do with student's identity and language acquisition as this would really impact my career path and would help me as a scholar to learn more about a problem regarding students' identity and how to deal with it."

SM: “Yes, the FELT from the AUC. I plan to admit to the PhD program of next year in my department, in addition to the CELTA.”

To conclude, it is clear that most of the participants believe that pursuing additional education, such as, certificates, diplomas and courses, is extremely crucial for a teacher’s career. It is considered that a teacher can gain numerous benefits from these learning experiences, on the professional and personal level. Along with experience, post graduate studies can help teachers to manage their student-teacher relation properly, implement trendy strategies in their teaching, and immensely increase their career growth.

4.2.4. Appreciation and Connection

Sixth, appreciation and connection were other aspects of a teacher’s professional identity. In the individual interviews, the participants were asked about the support they get in their institutions and the forms of this type of support. Some participants stated that it was important for them to feel appreciated by their supervisors. The appreciation came in the form of support; presenting new ideas, tips and resources in meetings and workshops and being praised and supported for this, motivated the teachers and made them have a sense of belonging to their institution.

AT: “Being appreciated, having room for promotion, being praised for new ideas and people in my institution are always urging teachers to come up with ingenious ideas and to present them in conferences and workshops.”

GH: “For me, support is clarity. Mentors who provide clear and detailed instructions of the hows and whats regarding a new curriculum are most supportive. I also find weekly meetings in which colleagues are encouraged to speak about and share their personal anecdotes can be a great eye opener and learning experience for everyone.”

RH: “Support is through appreciation. Continuous help from colleagues achieves support as well.”

One of the participants, DA explained that the feeling of appreciation and support stems from her mentors and colleagues. She said that she appreciates the feedback that she receives for

her work, especially constructive feedback which encourages her to exert more effort and motivates her to become a better teacher. Class observations were mentioned as well by several participants, stating their importance as they benefit from it because other teachers' observations provide various perspectives to different issues.

DA noted that it is extremely crucial to have the teachers' back in any situations they face, whether inside or outside the class or with the students' parents. For example, some students and parents would complain about a certain teacher, claiming that they failed / dropped the course because of this teacher or attendance problems claims.

DA: "There are several kinds of support that I receive from the institution I work at which definitely affects my teaching, motivation and eagerness to become a better teacher. First, observations with constructive feedback whether from peers or my supervisor are always of great help. Second, teacher autonomy; we are given the space to provide and work with whatever material we feel convenient to our students as long as we cover the course objectives. Third, a place that encourages you to pursue whatever professional development opportunities always has the most active and motivated teachers because they bring whatever new in the educational field to class and to the institution. Another important point is the supervisor's trust in you as a teacher so that when any problem arises, the teacher feels backed up and supported by the department's side."

Other participants stated that as a kind of support, it was important that their workplace is a positive environment. They explained that the competitiveness factor could lead to a negative atmosphere which might lead to reluctance and grudges between colleagues. As mentioned before, supervisors should be supportive and teachers should feel safe when sharing any situation or a problem that occurred.

KT: "I feel supported when I feel that my coworkers are willing to help and that the environment is not one of competitiveness and the pursuit of personal credit. Sharing tips, materials, advice, and the willingness to listen and give feedback is always helpful to me."

MK: “I think that appreciation and motivation (verbal/non-verbal) are very important in the workplace. I feel supported when I feel appreciated and when I’m praised for the good deeds I do inside and outside of the classroom. I’d feel supported when I feel at ease sharing with my supervisors what happened in the class to get advice rather than being scared to get penalized. I’d feel supported when I feel that my supervisors are not fishing for mistakes but rather observing to guide me.”

One of the teachers explained that she considered having up to date facilities in the institution she worked in as a healthy environment for her as a teacher. For example, air conditioned classrooms, photocopiers, smart boards, projectors, and internet connection are facilities that are considered as highly effective in ensuring a good atmosphere for an effective positive learning experience. Additionally, having a cooperative head of the department creates a healthy work environment. She also explained that having a clear plan for the curriculum and good resources makes the job easier. All that facilitates the work, saves time, motivates the teacher and leads to a tremendous contribution. EF also stated, as well as the other participants, that other teachers offering help is a major positive point as it leads to cooperation and a feeling of connection between the teachers. Having supportive colleagues and administration enhances this feeling of connection.

Other participants also stated that modern facilities and various resources are crucial in order to make their working time easier. They also stated that sharing their ideas, stories and issues with their colleagues gives them a sense of connection, especially when sharing common issues.

LS: “The fact that the class is well equipped with all the technologies and facilities I need makes my job way easier. My colleagues and I always share what we face in our classrooms, which tremendously supports me.”

LK: “We do encourage each other -casually- by being supportive and sharing ideas and experiences.”

HS: “I feel supported when there are all the needed facilities inside and outside the class for successful teaching. I also like it when there is peer collaboration and mentor’s assistance. In the department, there are various workshops by other teachers (Professional days) where teachers share best practices and materials.”

FA, an English instructor participant who is studying for her PhD, pointed out that at the institution in which she works; she is supported by having her teaching schedule adapted to her PhD schedule. The “encouragement” provided to her as a teacher, a learner and a researcher motivates her to study and research regarding her profession which results in a better performance, wider up to date perspective, modern teaching techniques, deeper understanding of students’ behavior and learning styles. It also results in professional improvement and career aspirations.

FA: “ Being flexible and supportive of my professional development through accommodating my teaching schedule and work commitments with the Master’s/PhD study load at another university, especially while having conflicting/challenging timings and requirements is one of the things that I feel strongly supported from my institution. Encouragement for more research and publication is also a huge plus.”

Other teachers, HT who is studying for her PhD and NW who just obtained her MA certificate, stressed on this point as well. They stated that this reflects positively on the place they work in and that “appreciation and recognition” is highly important for the teachers’ moral and emotional support.

HT: “Offering professional development workshops, allowing me time to work on research papers and present and attend international conferences, and showing appreciation and recognition to all the initiatives I take for the development of the department.”

NW: “I feel supported through trainings and professional development events sponsored by SCE and traveling opportunities for training and online courses provided by the institute. Also, I feel the support through providing me with material and support with the students’ issues and inquiries.”

One of the participants mentioned a crucial point which is the institutions' flexibility and understanding of their employees' personal issues or medical complications that might affect the teacher's performance momentarily.

SK: "If I am to talk about my last academic experience (BUE), I had a huge support from my superior colleagues (Professors) that was manifested in the collegial manner...their empathy and understanding in dealing with personal issues that temporarily affected my performance or even presence in class (sickness)."

4.3. Communities of Practice

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) coined the term "Communities of Practice". Then, Wenger expanded the CoP concept and implemented it in other contexts, such as organizations (2002). CoP is defined as groups of people who share something in common; a certain profession. These groups meet and interact regularly to share experiences, ideas and innovations, as well as find solutions for particular issues. There has been a significant interest in communities of practice and an expanding requirement for knowledge and information since the flourishing of online CoP on the internet.

Three components are required for the application of a community of practice; domain, community and practice. The domain is a network of people who share the same interest or passion (e.g. English instructors) and being a member of such a domain entails commitment. While the community includes forming a relationship between the members as they help and learn from each other, engage and interact in common activities and share information together. Then, the third component is the practice as the members of the group should be practitioners. A shared range of resources such as stories and experiences, useful tools and approaches to handle specific problems are developed, even by having casual conversations and informal discussions with people who share the same profession.

Communities enhance their practice through an assortment of strategies, such as critical thinking, problem solving, seeking others' experiences, addressing developments, recognizing weak points, synergy and coordination, requests for resources and information, visiting and meeting with the other members. According to Wenger, learning is crucial for human identity and this process of learning comes through social participation. The construction of one's identity is through being a dynamic participant and an active member in the practices of these communities.

In the four focus group interviews, some of the participants were familiar with the communities of practice (CoP) term especially the MA holders from the TESOL program. However, the participants who were not familiar with this term grasped its meaning from the researcher and the other participants. Consequently, they were asked to give a simple definition from their own background and according to their understanding and own perception as well. In the first group, GH explained the term of CoP while one of the other participants, GM mentioned that she is familiar with it from her readings about her thesis topic.

GH: "I think I remember that it's any group of people who meet frequently to discuss something or an aspect about their jobs or maybe they are having something related...maybe they are mums or teachers, they have something in common that they do together in different places but they are doing the same thing so..."

GM: "I have heard about the community of practice a lot in my thesis about video gamers and their community."

GH: "Like every time we meet or hang out, mostly with our friends who are teachers, so we end up talking about the classroom, the students, the syllabus, one way or another."

While in the second group, LK mentioned that she knew about the CoP term through her studies in the linguistics field.

LK: “Am familiar with it in the linguistics field, sociolinguistics, community of practice. It’s a community of people who share something together.”

In all the groups, the participants declared that they are always in communities of practice, even though it might be informal. As claimed by Wenger (1998), communities of practice could occur informally between people who share the same profession by holding informal conversations and sharing experiences and stories. Accordingly, the teachers stated that they are involved in formal and informal communities of practice. They explained that the informal CoPs usually occur when they come out of their classes and start to have informal conversations with their colleagues by sharing certain situations and useful ideas. The participants were asked about the type of information they shared with each other, they were also asked whether they share only negative situations or positive ones as well. They responded by saying that they usually share both experiences as they like to receive feedback from other teachers.

LK: “We’re always in communities of practice... we share stuff together.”

ST: “Yes, especially with our colleagues in the same office.”

MA: “We share our experiences.”

ST: “If we have a problem, for example, we had a troublemaker in the class, so you go and vent to your colleagues and they give you feedback or solutions as maybe they had the same situation in the past. So, they give you their experience so it is sharing.”

MA: “Sometimes it’s good things too. Something good that you did inside class and you had a positive feedback from your students so you share it with your colleagues to try it in their classes.”

In another group, they stated that the act of “venting out” to their colleagues in the office / department is a positive experience in itself. As mentioned above by the other group, the teachers prefer listening to their colleagues’ feedback, viewpoints and experiences. This helps

the teacher consider different perspectives and know whether their performance is accurate or not.

MS: “It always happens informally, the teacher comes out of their class and they enter their office and vent out to their colleagues after the class.”

WA: “Sometimes, it’s something positive, this act of informal venting out could be considered like that because you actually receive advice.”

A group of participants mentioned that they were members in a formal CoP in one of their courses in the TESOL program. It was in the form of a CFC (critical friendship circle) where it involved three to four members who shared their teaching experiences and stories with the members of their circle. They offered comments and constructive feedback to each other and these circles helped in encouraging reflective practices and developing collegial relations. Wenger (1998) stated that, being involved in these communities is considered an incentive for learning and a motivation for a better performance.

AT: “We had one in the last course in the TESOL program with Dr. Plumlee. We sat in groups, it changed every time-”

DA: “Yes, the CFCs.”

AT: “Yes, and we discussed the problems we faced in the institutions we worked at or problems with the students and we shared how to overcome them all and if the teachers felt the same way.”

Some participants from three of the groups also mentioned their involvement in what they considered as an online community of practice for teachers. They said that there were various Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups and forums that they followed; it included teachers sharing different situations and other members giving them advice, new ideas implemented in the classroom, various resources, and interesting conferences. The following excerpts are examples of the participants’ responses:

Group (1):

AT: “We had a group on Facebook called “AUC TESOL 2013 cohort” remember? We usually use it to share job opportunities, right?”

DA: “Yes, we share job opportunities, conferences we are interested in-”

AT: “-and interesting teaching ideas”

DA: “Asking for resources too...if any teacher encountered a certain problem and if they have a book or a resource for it. I did not know the terminology, it is new but yes I know what it is.”

Group (2):

RH: “There are several pages on social media related to teaching and teachers to share their experiences, what have they done, how they start their academic year, how they deal with the difficulties they face...etc. This is what I know for communities of practice in relation to Facebook and other social media.”

RS: “They also post stuff to ask about things and share job posts”

WA: “There are teachers who actually write their personal experiences in class, how they reacted in certain situations and how they developed.”

Group (3):

NW: “There is a WhatsApp group for AmidEast teachers, we are all there. They would share a book or an article that has to do with teaching.”

GH: “I think we are all part of many Facebook pages like The Teacher Next Door.”

As a result, the participants expressed their appreciation of being involved in such communities as they believed that they benefited from it, personally and professionally. The teachers explained that being engaged in those communities guided them to up to date and various teaching techniques, and different approaches for delivering an objective in class. It was also stated that the colleagues at the workplace or the members of the community could draw

one's attention towards something regarding students or grading. Moreover, it was said that they learned from each other's mistakes, took each other's advice and considered different viewpoints.

MB: "My colleagues would offer me effective teaching strategies and methodologies inside the classroom. We exchange knowledge and experience which would really help in finding the most effective techniques to guide students effectively and easily."

MS: "It is not always necessary that you share situations that happened with students or with teachers. You might have some difficulty preparing a certain objective or communicating a certain point to the students. It is really efficient when you ask a colleague."

In the following responses, these participants mentioned the importance of being in a critical friendship circle, which they considered a form of a CoP. They explained that they used to observe other members in their circle while teaching their classes. Then, they reflected on their experience, and gave feedback to the other members. Aside from that, the participants said that they compared between themselves as teachers and the other members that they observed, and reflected on their own teaching and experiences inside the classroom.

DA: "Of course, at least when reflecting. When I see myself in her shoes, I would do so and so. Yes, a similar situation happened to me but she reacted differently, maybe her reaction was better maybe not. So, it helps in at least reflecting on what you do in your own class or maybe you can discuss it. In the CFC, after we did the observation, we used to discuss it."

AT: "It is a really nice reflective tool. Sometimes, you do not realize that you did something in the wrong way except when your friend in the circle tells you "maybe you should have done so and so which would have resulted differently"

In the following responses, the participants described their experience thoroughly. They clarified that it was an experience that had a positive influence on them. On the personal level, DA explained that she was required to observe another teacher in a different setting. She stated

that it was an interesting experience that made her reflect on herself as a teacher by comparing the whole context, as it was entirely different for her. While on the professional level, WA declared that it was a positive experience for her to share concerns, incidents and lesson plans with other members of her community. As a consequence, she reflected on her teaching and understood certain issues from different perceptions.

DA: “That one was very inspiring to me because one of my CFC members used to teach in a private university in Alexandria. So, we had to go there to observe her class and it was a totally different setting, different students and different learning outcomes. I think because am in a closed circle, I thought that everything is typical in Egypt but this is not the case...the students are different because their major does not exist anywhere else in Egypt. They were maritime students; their background and their learning outcomes were totally different and even the way they perceived language classes. So, it was a totally different experience.”

WA: “In a previous job, we had this obligatory buddy system thing, which goes on every semester, where you had to share your experience with another teacher. So, we used to share lesson plans, issues inside the class or with the students. We used to give feedback to each other and it was a very positive experience because when you are on your own, you tend to look at things from your own perspective. So, it is good to consider other teachers’ perspectives.”

In addition to what had been said in the group interviews, the participants clarified their perceptions of communities of practice in the individual interviews. It was interesting to read all the participants’ answers because although most of them responded to the questions individually, they mostly had the same points of views and beliefs regarding CoP for teachers. They stated its advantages and explained that it is a principle component for teacher collaboration and a way of reducing teacher isolation.

The participants explained that as teachers, it is important to cooperate and interact with other teachers as this widens one’s own perspective. Consequently, collaboration between members in communities of practice serve both sides as it fulfills group and individual goals;

regular meetings to share ideas, improve individual skills, and develop the domain's common knowledge. Also, being involved in such communities motivates and encourages teachers to pursue further learning and research which helps their professional growth and career goals.

The following participants, DA and AT explained that in order to enhance a teacher's professional career, one has to be involved in professional development events, which they considered a result of being a member in a CoP. As previously mentioned, Wenger (1998) considered engagement in CoPs an incentive for further learning. They also stated that being engaged in those communities does not only turn to the teacher's advantage but to the institution they work at as well.

DA: "Of course! CoPs are one of the most important channels a teacher can always benefit from. It is the window you look from to see what you do and what you don't do in your class. They also make you indirectly evaluate yourself as a teacher to know where you stand among others. Through these PD events you reflect on yourself as a teacher, you make connections, your mind does not stop only at your institution's system and needs and you become more useful to your surrounding community.

AT: "I believe PD activities are very important for teachers' growth. ELI program at AUC offers many workshops presented by fellow teachers which allow all teachers to get exposed to different ideas and teaching methods. There is also a PD committee that holds events where teachers present their ideas and share their experiences at the classrooms."

Several participants mentioned that the institutions where they work in offer workshops before each semester in order to guarantee that all the teachers would be up to date with their teaching techniques and the materials used. Most of the participants considered those workshops as a form of a formal CoP as they meet regularly before each semester with their colleagues, trainers or supervisors to share their knowledge and best practices. Such workshops usually include: class management techniques, flipped classroom strategies, lesson plan design and activities, communicative teaching, assessment techniques, student motivation and blended

learning. HT, an English instructor in one of the universities, stated that they are given various types of workshops that include teaching to students with special needs:

HT: “Yes my institution offers professional development workshops; some of them were about teaching to students with special needs (ADHD), differentiated learning, and strategies for giving effective feedback on students’ writings!”

SM, another English instructor, said that they are offered frequent professional development workshops, which include several methods to approach different skills such as organizational and management skills:

SM: “Yes, I find them beneficial. The university offers regular PD (Professional Development) sessions. These sessions included the following: Different Methods of presenting Grammar and Vocabulary, Lesson planning and classroom Management, and Feedback and Error correction.”

While SS and YK, English instructors at another university, revealed that they are introduced in the workshops to ways of assessing different skills, modern teaching techniques and up to date academic platforms / websites that are utilized in the teaching field nowadays:

SS: “Yes I do find them very helpful especially the workshops that introduces us to a new way of teaching or a new academic platform (e.g. workshop on using Google classrooms, workshop on how to author a listening assessment etc.). AUC, the institution I am working at, provides multiple workshops such as Turnitin, how to use Google apps (drive, sheets, slides etc.), norming sessions, and pre-lecture meetings.”

YK: “Yes they do actually. We have a lot of workshops for assessments of different skills, like listening, speaking, reading and writing. They also share with us information on how to use the media efficiently in classrooms.”

Another English instructor explained that in their department, they attended formal workshops each semester, where they shared together the course outline, and discussed the lesson plans that included all the course objectives. It was also mentioned that they divided the workshop time as they contributed a part of it for presenting new material, either by the teachers

or the subject coordinators. Additionally, it was stated that they had weekly departmental meetings during each semester to discuss their concerns and tell their experiences:

ST: “Of course, they are extremely important and beneficial for me. Yes we do have workshops and weekly meetings. At the workshops, we gather to talk about the lesson plans and materials. For example: how can we explain the objectives in the best way possible in order to avoid wasting class time and to be direct. We also share experiences together regarding the trouble makers and how to deal with them. As for the weekly meeting during the semester, we talk about the outlines and lesson plans in detail. We also share the weekly experiences each of us had.”

However, a number of participants expressed their concern towards these types of workshops. It was stated that some of the workshops were unhelpful and were time consuming due to the way it was conducted. Besides, one of the participants said that sometimes these workshops did not include new material:

MB: “Yes they offer workshops but I do not like them all as they do not offer new and helpful information we just go through the same material. However, sometimes they offer workshops including new techniques that would help us instructors inside the class or even ease the teaching and learning process.”

SK: “Yes, I have. I was given many workshops at BUE covering different aspects and tools of teaching. Some of them were really beneficial, others were a waste of time and energy due to the way they were conducted.”

Another participant illustrated one of her experiences during one of the workshops in which she attended. She explained that she considered being presented with new interesting information is crucial to her teaching profession, but sometimes these workshops might include irrelevant topics for teachers and is considered a waste of time:

GH: “I find them very essential when they offer new information. However, they can be a great waste if time and tiresome when the content is something I can simply Google. For example, I had attended a workshop at AUC where two speakers stood at the extreme side of the continuum; one speaker talked about classroom time management tips that I

found really helpful in terms of tracking time of tasks carried out and so on, whereas another speaker talked about copyright protection tips which I found quite irrelevant and not important to me.”

EF, stated that some workshops were extremely theoretical as they only discussed theories but no practical material was offered. She claimed that it was essential to design these teacher meetings according to their needs:

EF: “Yes in some way, not all of them of course as sometimes they are very theoretical and the problem is that they don’t apply to all levels of learners. Normally you have to design or tailor the workshops to cater to different levels, so when you gather all teachers of all levels in one workshop it doesn’t work well.

Moreover, some participants considered teacher training programs as another form of communities of practice. They used to meet with their trainees (teachers) regularly and some of them were on a daily basis, where they helped other teachers to develop and improve their teaching skills. These participants shared with the researcher their experiences in these programs and acknowledged the benefits they gained from these experiences. They described their experience as “challenging” and “intimidating” because they were required to train teachers who were of the same age or even older experienced ones.

The participants said that this experience had a positive influence on their teaching skills and techniques. They learned to develop their ability to deal with older students and they also stated that this engagement increased their self-confidence. Likewise, these teachers (trainers) gained knowledge from their trainees (older teachers) as they spent a decent amount of time together during these trainings, and both exchanged ideas, information, and experiences.

GH: “After earning my MA, I took part in a teacher training program as a trainer. That was very challenging and intimidating to be training teachers like me, but it helped me develop my confidence in my own knowledge and abilities, and it was also enlightening

as I shared many creative and interesting ideas with my trainees. They definitely added to my knowledge!”

MB: “Yes, I joined training for governmental school teachers which positively impacted my teaching methodologies and skills, as teachers were old in 50s and 60s and I was only in my mid 20s, so I gained new teaching strategies and skills on how to deal with people who are older than me without embarrassing them and with a good technique to deliver the required objectives.”

The individual interviews and focus group interviews data analysis indicate that teachers considered several aspects for their professional identity. These aspects included their role and the essential characteristics of an effective teacher, competence and self-efficacy regarding different skills, appreciation from supervisors and colleagues, as well as connection with their peers and their workplace. Also, their future career plans and aspirations. Another prominent result is the teachers’ viewpoints in regards to communities of practice, its different forms from their own perspectives and its role in positively influencing their teaching skills. Despite the fact that most of the participants appreciated their CoP experiences, a few of them reported some concerning points that should be taken into consideration.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

The final chapter discusses the main findings of this study which were illustrated in chapter four.

It elaborates the results and relates to previous research that was conducted on the same topic.

Section 5.2 discusses the first research question about the English instructors' viewpoints of their professional identity. Section 5.3 discusses the second research question about communities of practice and its outcome on the instructors' professional identity. Section 5.4 presents some practical implications based on the research questions. Section 5.5 and 5.6 outlines the study limitations and future research suggestions.

5.2. Teachers' Perceptions of Their Professional Identity and Aspects That Affect It

The aim of the first research question was to explore the perceptions of English instructors' professional identity (PI) within an Egyptian setting. Results indicated that the instructors had similar viewpoints regarding a teacher's professional identity, and there were no crucial differences between the responses collected through the individual interviews and those collected during the focus-group interviews. Four main themes emerged from their responses which were common aspects that were considered essential for the professional identity of a teacher. Prior to the formation and development of a professional identity, there were factors that also affected the teachers' PI, such as teacher training programs and additional certificates. These factors, in addition to experience resulted in common perceptions between the instructors.

Participants considered their professional identity as a certain set of opinions and beliefs of how a teacher should be, and most of their perceptions were similar, according to the data. Similarly, Hsieh (2013) explained that teachers defined their professional identity as the values,

beliefs and obligations an individual considers regarding being a teacher. The first theme that emerged was the teacher's role, and the essential characteristics that should be present in any teacher. The instructors stressed on the feature of flexibility when dealing with their students. A teacher is required to be lenient and professional, at the same time, inside and outside the class; clearly established rules are important to create a positively productive learning environment and leads to a well-disciplined class.

In addition to flexibility, patience was the second feature to be mentioned. Patience and respect is needed when instructing students as there are different types of students with different learning styles. Also, comprehension abilities and its speed differ from an individual to another, which requires considerable patience. Fairness was another characteristic that was mentioned, as it is required that teachers should handle all the students equally without favoring a student over the other. While all the previously mentioned features are important, most of the teachers stated that it is crucial to have a positive attitude towards the students and to be dedicated to the teaching profession. Likewise, positive attitude is reflected on students and they are motivated to take part in the learning process (Timostsuk & Ugaste, 2010).

Contradictorily, Carrillo and Baguley (2011) found that university teachers reported that they did not have a smooth relation with their students which resulted in tension. They explained that this was due to cultural differences and miscommunication. They also stated that some teachers were disappointed that their students were not as dedicated or passionate about their subject as they expected them to be, which affected their connection and teacher-student relationship.

All these characteristics play a critical role in leaving an impression on one's own students, an impression that is required to be positive and professional. As a result, the second main theme which is competence and self-efficacy emerged. In order to evaluate self-efficacy, a teacher should compare their current performance to past performances (El-Deghaidy, 2006). Results showed that participants regarded their self-efficacy through the effectiveness of their instructional and teaching practices. Most of the participants expressed the importance of good preparation, the involvement of life-related and up to date materials. El-Deghaidy (2006) stated that, course preparation has an impact on the teacher's confidence, effectiveness and self-efficacy as it is also a foundation for future practices. Moreover, teachers' self-efficacy is considered by researchers as a personal resource that can increase their participation and engagement at work (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leitner, 2011).

Additionally, Masoumpanah and Zarei (2014) stated that Iranian instructors had a strong sense of their pedagogical competence, which positively affected their professional identity. They explained that although those instructors did not have native-like accent, they considered teaching English as a vital objective, and wanted their own students to learn native-like accent. This type of persistent commitment influenced their competence and their PI. In a similar manner, the instructors in this study felt that pursuing teacher learning in order to improve one's performance, and insisting on monitoring students' performance (even the reluctant ones) is another way of commitment that highly affects their competence.

Organization and management skills were also mentioned in regards to the instructors' self-efficacy. Some participants stated that they it is preferable to prepare and organize everything related to the course taught, prior to the semester as it was claimed that it helped in time management. Other participants mentioned that there were some skills that needed

enhancement, such as being able to manage their board and use it in an organized way. An instructor stated that she enrolled in a course that targeted these types of skills and helped her in this problem. In the same vein, Fletcher, Kosnik and Mandigo (2013) claimed that, teachers being involved in programs that included activities targeting the enhancement of certain teaching skills would positively affect their competence and self-efficacy.

Based on the participants' responses, most of them were experienced instructors who had prior teaching experience. These responses indicate that previous experience strongly influences the instructors' professional identities. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) propose that the PI of a teacher is dynamic and is likely to change regularly as a result of previous jobs and life experience.

Consequently, the results of this research support their claim as the participants reported that they acquired organization and management skills throughout their previous experiences. However, very few teachers had limited teaching experience and expressed their intention towards enrolling in teacher training programs and workshops which will add to their current knowledge. Essentially, it is suggested by Freeman and Johnson (1998) that teacher training programs should consider their previous experiences, beliefs and viewpoints. The element of experience resulted in different responses between the participants in this particular point, as years of experience is an important aspect to consider. The years of experience highly affected the organization and management skills of the teachers, as they were acquired by time and experience.

Appreciation and connection was a third aspect mentioned in the participants' interview responses. According to the instructors, being appreciated for one's work and effort is extremely

important as it encourages production and enhances professional identity. It is said that such efforts being taken into consideration by supervisors and even colleagues enhances self-confidence and competence. Also, the results showed that being supported creates a feeling of connection between the teachers. To illustrate, the instructors expressed their appreciation for the support they are given by their peers and supervisors. Regardless, university instructors who sensed that their academic worth or teaching skills were questioned affected their self-esteem and their sense of being appreciated by their institution, which subsequently negatively impacted their PI (Lankveld et al., 2017).

A group of participants said that the act of “venting out” to their colleagues is one of the aspects that make them feel connected with the other teachers, as they share their concerns, ask for advice and learn from each other. Along the same lines, Day and Kington (2008) argue that, the approaches of the environment of the workplace, students and the administration system affects the teachers’ professional identity. Furthermore, Timostsuk and Ugaste (2010) claim that emotions and feelings are fundamental factors that affect a teacher’s professional identity. They suggest that such feelings occur due to the teachers developing good relations with their peers, students, and institutions. However, Jones (2007) reported that, teachers considered that some staff interaction as ‘fearful’ because they felt that they were being under surveillance, which negatively impacted their teacher identity. It is explained that they were afraid that they were being reported to superiors, which affected their connection with some of their colleagues.

Data generated from the interviews uncovered the significance of developing and improving professional capabilities throughout all profession phases, especially teaching. All the instructors declared that the moment they decided to become instructors, advancement proved to be fundamental, and that they are in a perpetual condition of advancement. Their perceptions and

beliefs were reflected in their responses in which they stated that, teaching and instructing is a demanding type of profession which needs continuous learning throughout their career. One of the participants described the learning process as a trial and error experience that each teacher goes through in their classrooms. While other participants expressed the importance of being an endless learner as the teaching profession always requires being up to date. Therefore, the agency concept is included in a teacher's PI because of the ongoing pursuit for improvement (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

The fourth aspect of teachers' PI emerged when they were asked about their future trajectories and plans. The majority of the instructors pursued their MA degrees and some of them were already studying for their PhD. They exclaimed that it is advisable for a teacher to be aware of their capabilities in order to follow their career aspirations. Teacher learning also enhances their skills as they study modern teaching methodologies, modern in-class implementations and student behavior. On one hand, Hawk, Y. Zahng, X. Zahng and Zhao (2016) argue that teacher learning is crucial as it affects their PI strongly and improves their chances for future occupations. The findings of their study showed that there was a positive relation between professional identity, learning motivations and teacher training programs. Moreover, developing a strong professional identity spurs a better performance in their jobs, as well as future occupations. On the other hand, Masoumpanah and Zarei (2014) stated that Iranian instructors always preferred to attend workshops, professional development activities and conferences despite being unappreciated by their institutions.

The findings of this study support the findings of Chung-Parsons (2016) and Chung-Parsons and Bailey (2018) that the development of a teacher's PI is neither a singular nor a linear pathway. It is claimed that experience, motivation and teacher learning influences the

development of their professional identity. Nevertheless, the few participants in this study who were novice teachers and had limited experience stated that their identities were constructed as they acquired the ‘teacher role’. They explained that in addition to actual teaching, workshops and observations helped a bit in forming their teacher identity. This dynamic and authentic educational context affects the formation of their identity in a crucial way (Xu, 2013). Yet, these contexts might not be able to replicate similar environments to those teachers when they are teaching (Farrell, 2009).

However, there were some discrepancies between the findings of this study and other studies in the supposition of teacher professional identity. The different periods where teacher identity has been characterized and the standards that have pertained at various times are a clear reason for these discrepancies. For example, Beijaard et al. (2004) and Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) claimed that, a teacher’s professional identity is not a fixed construct. Also, researchers Kelchtermans (1994) and Nias (2002) did not perceive a teacher’s commitment as a main component of their professional identity. Furthermore, Liu and Xu (2011) explored the professional identity of English teachers in the University of China, and they found that some of the teachers reported intense identity struggles and feelings of tension because their competence was not recognized by others. Archer (2008) claimed that, young academics also struggled with their professional identity as they felt that their work effort was unappreciated. He explained that the work environment was supposed to be the place where these academics experienced appreciation for their work / teaching.

5.3. Communities of Practice and Its Effect on Teachers' Professional Identity

The aim of the second research question was to investigate the English instructors' perceptions regarding communities of practice (CoP), their involvement and experiences as well as its effect on their professional identity. All participants in the focus group interviews were asked if they were familiar with the term of communities of practice, and some of them were familiar with it and had prior knowledge while others were not. Despite the fact that this phenomenon is old, the CoP term "is of relatively recent coinage" (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). This concept resulted in providing a helpful viewpoint regarding learning and knowing as a growing number of organizations and individuals are currently concentrating on CoPs as a vital aspect for performance improvement.

In this study, the three elements of a CoP by Wenger and Wenger-Trayner (2015): domain, community and practice are clearly shown. The shared domain of interest that is identified is the English language instructors, whereas the communities that they are members of are the regular workshops provided to them by their institutions. Based on the data, a substantial number of participants considered workshops provided by their institutions as a form of CoPs. These workshops are usually conducted before each semester where all the teachers meet and they start practicing; share experiences, useful tools, various resources and solutions for problems. Institutions that create an encouraging learning environment for their instructors had greatly impacted their professional identity. Therefore, these workshops and the support offered by colleagues, experienced teachers and supervisors are identified as essential resources regardless of the instructors' prior experience (Abdel-Fattah, 2016).

However, some participants expressed their feelings towards some workshops that they attended. They explained that the way it was presented and conducted could result in boredom due to the lack of practical ideas and implementations that were expected to be presented. Also, they stated that sometimes it could be a waste of time or it was the kind of information that any individual could search for online. Alternatively, Gallagher, Griffin, Parker, Kitchen and Figg (2011) suggest that participating in a community should provide the space for authentic conversations, where teachers share their experiences and stories together. Further, Barak, Gidron and Turniansky (2010) state that, sharing knowledge is social as it is produced amongst purposeful conversations, and dialogues that happen in communities. Moreover, Yuan and Mak (2018) exclaim that the lack of engagement between CoP members negatively impacts teachers' learning and reduces motivation.

Observation and self-reflection were two main aspects that instructors mentioned regarding CoP and its effect on their PI. In one of the contexts, they stated that they used to be involved in a critical friendship circle, which they considered a type of CoP, where a group of teachers meet, have a discussion and provide constructive feedback to each other. It was required that they observe other teachers, reflect and give their comments and feedback to those teachers. Cooper and Olson (1996) claim that, through self-reflection and evaluation, a teacher's identity is informed, formed, and reformed perpetually since they develop through interaction with others and over time.

One of those observations was in an extremely different context, and the participant explained how this experience affected her as a teacher. She reflected on herself and her teaching practices by comparing between herself and the other teacher. It was mentioned that it changed her perspective towards certain issues and her reactions in certain situations as they differed from

a teacher to another. Furthermore, Abdel-Fattah (2016) states that, teacher's exposure to different contexts expands their experience, and makes them consider different perspectives. Also, it is a rewarding experience for the teacher as it develops their understanding of the "sociocultural aspects of teaching and learning due to the process of comparing and contrasting that occurs when they deal with different students, policies, and institutions." (Abdel-Fattah, 2016).

Moreover, the results in this study showed that the teachers preferred communities of practice that involved new teaching strategies in order to upgrade their teaching practices. They also stated that it is crucial to incorporate technology in their classes and provide the students with life-related material. Developing one's own teaching and instructional practices requires the teachers to improve their skills. Substantially, meeting with other teachers, outlining the course objectives, planning lessons and assignments, and sharing new ideas to be implemented in the classes affects the teachers' professional identity, especially the aspect of self-efficacy. Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (1999) affirm that teachers' efficacy is affected by their PI perceptions, as well as their willingness to deal with all the educational developments and changes in order to apply new ideas in their classes / teaching practices.

In order to be up to date in the teaching profession and to develop one's skills, instructors exclaimed that it is important to attend workshops, national and international conferences, and teacher training sessions. Few of them stated that it has been inconvenient for them to attend international conferences, so they join online conferences such as Mooc and Webinar. In addition, other instructors mentioned the importance of self-learning through reading books, research papers, and online courses such as Coursera, EDX, Udemy and Idrak. Wenger's (1998) 'sociocultural learning theory' claimed that significant learning arises in a "socially situated learning process in a community of practice".

Some of the participants considered joining online forums for teachers, being in WhatsApp groups and Facebook groups and pages to be a type of communities of practice. To a certain degree, these communities include two elements out of the three main elements of CoPs. They include the domain, which are the English instructors and the community where they share information, stories, advice and conferences. Meanwhile, the third element which is practice does not occur. In the last ten years, researchers such as, Baran and Cagiltay (2010), Boulton and Hramiak (2012) and Clarke (2009) raised the importance and supported the concept of online CoPs as it is claimed that it is a collaborative professional learning environment. CoPs are considered a powerful motivator and beneficial model for supporting and developing teachers' professional learning.

5.4. Limitations

In terms of the limitations of this study, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all Egyptian instructors who teach English courses in universities as this study was conducted regarding private institutions only. Instructors working in governmental contexts might have given additional results and various perceptions of their professional identity. Additionally, it is necessary to note that the instructor communities involved in this study included instructors sharing the joint practice of being instructors in a student-centered English courses. Wenger (1998) claimed that such a joint endeavor is probably one of the basic factors supporting informal learning, and thereby the enhancement of a common instructor PI.

Furthermore, all the participants in this study are females due to the difficulty in finding male English instructors, who might have given different perspectives from a males' point of view about the teaching profession. Also, most of the participants were experienced instructors

but a few novice instructors were included, who might still be exploring and developing their professional identity. Due to the instructors' busy schedules and the difficulty of meeting, the individual interviews and follow up questions had to be sent through email although the researcher would have preferred to have face to face interviews. Despite the fact that the group interviews generated a great deal of interesting data, it is difficult to generalize these results due to the limited number of participants who participated in the focus group interviews. Finally, the researcher did not investigate whether teachers' professional identities were affected before and after joining the communities of practice.

5.5. Practical Implications

In contrast to the aforementioned limitations, it is apparent that the results of this study show that being a member of a community of practice is extremely crucial for a teacher. Learning about teaching should not be an individual task only but it should include social learning and involvement in productive environments that enhances one's own skills. To add, educators need to create "thought-provoking" workshops in order for the instructors to be engaged, build relationships with others and encourage each other, which would increase the sense of belonging and commitment.

First, these workshops are communities that should stimulate the instructors to exchange their experiences, share and develop mutual knowledge as these types of interactions contribute to increase their self-confidence. Second, instructors' efficacy and competence supports their extrinsic recognition through experience, observations (being observed in class visits and observing peers), formal and informal communities of practice. Third, membership in CoPs promotes a high sense of connection with other teachers and encourages collegial support and

learning through various activities. Fourth, this study shows that teachers' agency is strengthened through experience and facing various situations, and could be enhanced for some teachers by setting up spaces for the instructors to share their problems and identify solutions.

This study suggests that teachers' professional identity could be supported in various ways. To begin with, teacher educators and teacher education programs need to provide novice teachers a realistic environment, such as, similar situations in actual classes. Consequently, they will be able to perceive the profession from a realistic perspective and form an overall picture of their professional identity. For instance, teaching practicum ought to provide observations for the novice teachers so that they could watch experienced teachers in actual classes. By that, it will not only stress the enhancement of their teaching skills, but also improve their institutional setting awareness. Additionally, it would give a real life experience and they would be aware of the issues they will encounter in class. Then, teacher educators and trainers should emphasize agency and dedication in young teachers with the aim that the change in their PI would be more positively and effectively guided.

The findings also suggest that professional development and teacher training programs are required to create spaces for teachers, where discrepancies and miscommunication which arises due to cultural differences can be addressed and voiced. Moreover, the results highlight the importance of self-efficacy and professional commitment that should be a crucial objective in the teachers' training programs / courses. Their enhancement would positively affect teachers' performance, professional identity and even professional morals, particularly when taking teaching-related decisions.

Finally, some of the participants expressed their appreciation of being involved in the interviews, as they stated that their voice was heard and they could share their experiences and concerns. They were highly interested in the interview questions, as they were able to reflect on their professional identities, their teaching practices, as well as discuss several issues with other teachers (in group interviews). It is suggested that during formal / informal workshops and communities of practice, teachers should be able to reflect upon their selves and should be encouraged to share their perceptions and concerns. As for novice teachers, they should be taught to be aware of the importance of self-reflection, as it is a method of improvement for one's teaching, and even personal and social skills.

5.6. Future Research

Although the instruments utilized to gather data for this study were reliable and valid, and as a result variables of this research were described based on the data and responses obtained from the interviews, few suggestions by the researcher could be considered.

First, teacher role /characteristics, self-efficacy and competence, career aspirations and future trajectories, appreciation and connection were used to define the instructor's professional identity. Although these aspects are immensely relevant to a teacher's PI, there are other aspects that were not explored and investigated, such as self-esteem and agency (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006) and unethical stances (Eren & Rakıcioğlu-Söylemez, 2017). Accordingly, considering the previously mentioned aspects in further research might provide additional comprehensive results in regards to this topic.

Second, as it was previously mentioned in the limitations, whether teachers' professional identities before and after joining the communities of practice were affected, was not

investigated. Therefore, it is recommended to investigate how those communities change teachers' identities in future research. Also, future studies should consider applying observational methods, such as in-class observations to examine instructors' perspectives more extensively. It is also recommended that a descriptive statistical approach would be applied for data analysis.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Part 1: Individual Interview Questions

A) Teachers' educational and professional background and teaching experience:

- 1) Please introduce yourself.
- 2) Tell me about your educational and professional background. (Weiner & Torres, 2016)
- 3) What were some of the reasons you had for pursuing teaching? (Weiner & Torres, 2016)
- 4) What made you decide to work in a university?
- 5) For how long have you been teaching?

B) Perceptions of their own professional identity and the factors affecting it:

- 6) Once you're in the classroom, how prepared do you feel? Do you prepare for each class? (Weiner & Torres, 2016)
- 7) Can you describe your relationship with your students? And how do you face challenging situations / issues in the classroom?
- 8) How would you rank your own effectiveness as a teacher? Why? (Weiner & Torres, 2016)
- 9) What are the things in place that helps you feel supported as a teacher in your institution? In what ways do your colleagues and other members of the department support you? (Weiner & Torres, 2016)

C) Teachers' views about communities of practice and its effect on their Professional Identity:

- 10) What experiences have made you feel most connected to your job and your colleagues? (Weiner & Torres, 2016)
- 11) Do you find communities of practice (Professional development activities/teacher learning/workshops/ online forums and pages for teachers) necessary and beneficial for you and your profession? Does your institution offer any of those activities? If so, could you please describe them? (Yilmaz, 2016)

- 12) What initiatives do you take for your own development as a teacher? (Yilmaz, 2016)
- 13) Have you ever been involved in any type of teacher training programs? How did it affect you?

D) Exploring teachers' future goals regarding their career and professional growth:

- 14) Have you received any additional certificates related to the teaching field?
- 15) Do you have any future plans for your career? Please explain.
- 16) How do you define "career and professional growth"? (Weiner & Torres, 2016)

Part 2: Focus Group Questions

- 1) Please explain what are the aspects of a teacher's professional identity from your own point of view?
- 2) What are the attitudes and qualities that you think are essential for a teacher?
- 3) Illustrate how you use your decision-making, problem solving and organizational skills.
- 4) What are the teaching and management skills that you think you need to develop?
- 5) Are you familiar with the term "Communities of Practice"? Have you been involved in any? Can you please tell us your experience?
- 6) How do you think you benefited from it? If not, would you join a CoP? Would you encourage your colleagues to do so as well?
- 7) May you please share with us some of your tips/plans for a teacher's professional growth?

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

CASE #2018-2019-162



To: Heidi Sadek
Cc: Sara Tarek
From: Atta Gebril, Chair of the IRB
Date: July 26, 2019
Re: Approval of study

This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled "**Teacher Perceptions of Professional Identity and Communities of Practice**" and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" category. As you are aware, the members of the IRB suggested certain revisions to the original proposal, but your new version addresses these concerns successfully. The revised proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.

This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor, Dr. Ashraf Hatem. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.

This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Atta Gebril".

Dr. Atta Gebril
IRB chair, The American University in Cairo
2046 HUSS Building
T: 02-26151919
Email: agebril@aucegypt.edu

A logo consisting of a yellow square followed by a dark blue rectangle.

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Appendix C

Consent Form



Documentation of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study

Project Title: Teacher Perceptions of Professional Identity and Communities of Practice.

Principal Investigator: Heidi Mohamed Badr Eldin Heidibadr@aucegypt.edu

- You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research is to explore higher education English instructors' perceptions of their teacher/professional identities and how they see themselves as teachers. This study will also focus on the perspectives towards the effect of communities of practice on teachers' professional identity, and the findings may be *published, presented, or both*. The expected duration of your participation is 20-25 minutes.
- The procedures of the research will be as follows: A written consent, as well as an oral one will be obtained from all the participating instructors since the interviews will be recorded. The purpose of the study will be generally explained before conducting the interviews. Interviews will be administered with each instructor separately in 20 - 25 minutes.
- You might be asked to participate in a focus group after finishing your interview. The focus group will include 3 - 4 participants and will be administrated in 30 - 35 minutes. The researcher will be the group moderator, overview the topic and set rules for the discussion. Then, seven questions will be asked and discussed through the group participants.
- There *will not be* certain risks or discomforts associated with this research.
- There *will be* benefits to you from this research. You might be able to relate more to your profession, discover more about yourself and your professional identity. The teachers who will participate in the focus group will be able to relate to other teachers and benefit from each other's ideas, experiences and beliefs.
- The information you provide for purposes of this research *is confidential*.
- Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature:

Printed Name:

Date: